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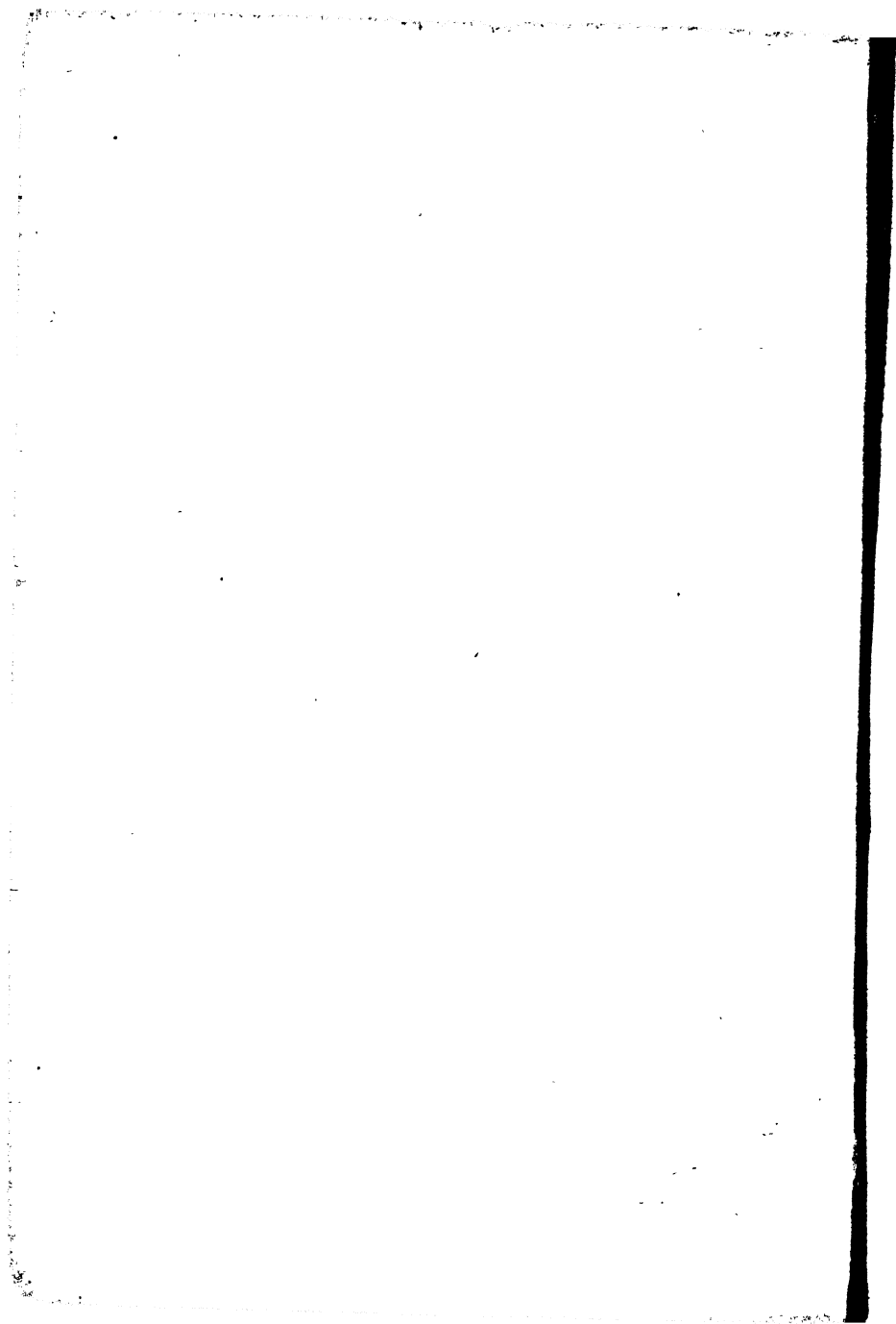
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# *Committed to His Charge*

*A Canadian Chronicle*

*BY*

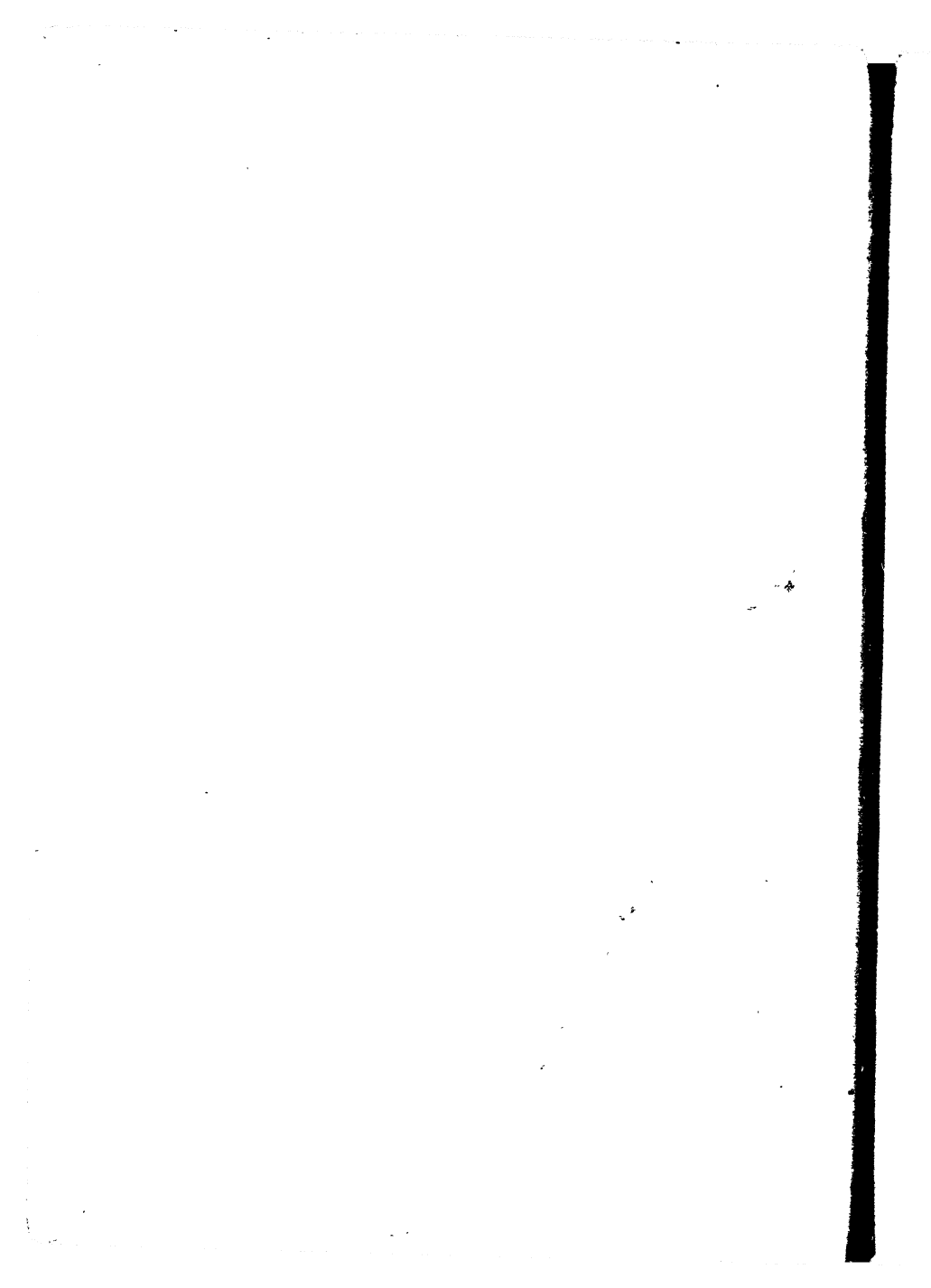
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# CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I.—HER REVERENCE - - - -	I
II.—THE GUILD - - - -	12
III.—THE GOSPEL OF HOME- - - -	36
IV.—POLITICS <i>vs.</i> RELIGION - - - -	56
V.—INNOVATIONS- - - -	69
VI.—MISS SWEETING DINES- - - -	88
VII.—THE COUNTRYSIDE- - - -	102
VIII.—THE CHOIR TERRESTRIAL - - - -	127
IX.—A TEAPOT TEMPEST - - - -	145
X.—THE CHURCH MILITANT - - - -	165
XI.—VICTORY- - - -	188
XII.—THE FATAL KISS - - - -	207
XIII.—AFTERNOON TEARS AND TEA - - - -	221
XIV.—MR. FORBY'S SECOND LOVE AFFAIR - - - -	232
XV.—THE BURDEN RESUMED- - - -	253
XVI.—IO TRIOMPHE - - - -	261
XVII.—THE REMITTANCE MAN - - - -	274
XVIII.—THE END OF THE SIN OF SILENCE - - - -	291
XIX.—CONCLUSION - - - -	298



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# COMMITTED TO HIS CHARGE

## CHAPTER I

### HER REVERENCE



CRISIS had arrived in the history of the Parish of Slowford-on-the-Sluggard.

And Miss Sweeting knew it.

After much puzzled consideration, she had come to the decision that her interests and those of the parish were identical.

For nineteen years she had, practically, ruled. Now the Rector, who had so faithfully done her bidding, lay dying. Soon the king would be dead; and before crying "Long live the king," it behoved her to see who should be king.

Days passed, and the life spent in a round of usefulness for others went out. The weaknesses, the shortcomings of office, were all forgotten, and nothing was remembered but the loveliness of the man, as is the way of the world when it is too late to show patience or to

## Committed to his Charge

extenuate faults. Easy, indolent, loving parochial visits more than parochial work, winning hearts more easily over a cup of tea than by sound doctrine from the pulpit, the Reverend Caleb Short had managed to slip through life without encountering the sharper edges of its pathways. And why should he encounter them, when one so willing and capable as Miss Sweeting was ever ready to be in advance? As a girl near the twenties she had begun her mission of Church work, in a somewhat erratic fashion; but as the excitement of dance and picnic wore off she found that her fervent nature required sustenance of a more enduring kind.

She was a good woman, Dulcissima Sweeting, none better,—agreeable to some; but to others her ways savoured of meddlesomeness, and there were those who went further and said she was a busy-body. However, she did work, Sunday and week-day alike; no one denied it. They only—that is, some of them—wished that she did not.

So now in the midst of her grief, and her grief was real, she had an eye to the practical issue as to who was to fill the vacant place.

## Committed to his Charge

There would be war. Every one knew that. The High Church party in the congregation, those who wished to stand during the offertory and have an alms basin, who longed for a surpliced choir and a floral cross on the altar at Easter, would make a desperate effort to put in a man of progressive views. This party consisted of the bankers and others who were not Slowford people proper. Their man was chosen already—one with a wife given to soup-kitchens and Dorcas meetings, and with daughters who were curates in all but name.

Him they should not have. Not because Miss Sweeting was not High herself—circumstances and the Reverend Caleb Short had made her Low,—but she was of such an accommodating disposition to the cloth generally that she might have become anything under guidance. Her reason against this first choice was that his feminine following would mean death to her. Indeed, had he been High of the celibate kind, her objections on that score might have been overcome easily. Celibates ere this had been weaned and converted from their ways; it would be interesting, too, to convert one.

The Low Church party were for a man of

## Committed to his Charge

purely evangelical type, one who would let the stone crosses, intended for the last ornamentation of the church, remain in the cellar where they had been thrust ignominiously by the Building Committee thirty years before, stones which proved that they could do what rolling ones proverbially cannot. These crosses were so ornate, so disguised, that it almost would have been necessary to label them; but ornamentation did not signify to those members who had determined in years gone by to be true till death to their purely Protestant principles. The members still lived and they still protested.

Their chosen man seemed eligible; apart from his views, which, upon hearsay, Miss Sweeting feared were narrow, he had merit in being a bachelor. It was upon him her casting vote should be given. Not that the Parish of Slowford was advanced enough to wish that its women had votes in the vestry, far from it. The Women's Guild provided everything as it was required, or bidden, from a school-house or a Sunday-school teacher to a penwiper for a warden; it was the channel through which flowed that golden stream that came from mite collection, bazaar, concert or lecture funds; but

## Committed to his Charge

with working and giving the woman's privilege ceased. She listened to St. Paul and kept silent in the church—unless in such functions as choir service, at which St. Paul is supposed to wink. But there are ways and ways, and a Past-Grand-Mistress-of-Ways was Miss Sweeting.

It never entered her mind that with one change might come many, that the time for revolt had arrived and that the parish to a man, or rather to a woman, had determined to have no bachelor, but to have a pastor safely married and out of harm's—that is out of her—way. Even those who had profited most from her work, and presumably liked her best, felt that some effort for freedom should be made. It would be a bad initial step, be his views ever so worthy, if he wished—if she wished—to convert Miss Sweeting into Mrs. Rector.

So it turned out that when the meeting to decide all things finally was called, High and Low forgot their animosities and met on a common ground, some compromise by which they might be delivered from Miss Sweeting.

It was easy of accomplishment. Each side gave up its man and let the choice fall on one of a middle variety, one who would leave the

## Committed to his Charge

crosses still gathering moss, but who might permit a little livelier service ; one safely weighted with a young wife, and four babies under five years of age. He was an Englishman, much older than his wife, clever, said to have been rather erratic, was tired of a mastership in a school and was ready for a living. Slowford was prosperous in a modest way and offered sixteen hundred a year for a suitable man, and felt it was doing handsomely by him. The church was supposed to be in thorough order, the organ had two manuals and over twenty stops, the choir was unlike most choirs, inasmuch as it had existed with the one membership and without any serious civil wars for many years ; and last, but not least, the Rectory was comparatively new and well appointed after Slowford notions. The Reverend Thomas Huntley was "called" ; the Bishop was interviewed, and persuaded that a man from another diocese was necessary. The Guild adopted the method of "calling," and a wise Bishop knows his own Guild.

The new man came, and dismay followed. He insisted upon alterations and improvements in the house ; he commented upon the unfinished



## Committed to his Charge

grey walls of the church, and spoke of "dis-temper" and "conventional designs" and carved oak in a way most distressing to the wardens; he referred nearly everything to his wife and consulted her convenience before committing himself to any plan; he levelled the lawn with innumerable loads of loam, had it sodded, and on the green expanse set a white net, stretched between stakes, which puzzled the curious and scandalized the knowing; and altogether he conducted himself in a manner new to Slowford, doubly disconcerting in a clergyman. He brought with him three dogs, and his study walls were hung with a secular-looking assortment of fishing-tackle and fire-arms. The old Rector had been almost the cause of a scandal through a fancy for botany, geology, and entomology; but compared with sporting gear and noisy dogs, his beetles and weeds were evidences of piety. Furthermore, Mrs. Huntley was a very pretty woman, and it was whispered that she had a small independent fortune. Almost before the people realized the meaning of the overturn, the new Rector had read himself in.

However the people may have thought that

## Committed to his Charge

the star of Sweeting had set, never to rise again, she held her peace, trusting to circumstances, to her own guile and to other people's laziness, to bring round a certain part of her old power. She had an unshaken faith in the divine law of compensation, and waited patiently. Her dismay, though strictly hidden, was great. It brought back to her that terrible moment in childhood, when, in a sheltered home-corner, a sudden falling-out had ended in the demolition of her "house"—a rickety packing-case set on end, wherein she displayed fragments of broken crockery, a three-legged chair and two dolls, her "babies," Jerusha and Dorothy by name, who owed their existence to the ordered decapitation of her father's gateposts. The anguish of those moments, when the child-mother saw her three-legged treasure sent flying, her packing-case demolished, and Jerusha and Dorothy making an unpremeditated sacrifice in her step-mother's kitchen fire, could never be repeated. Alas, real mother joys were never to be hers! From many causes the word home had no significance for her, except when by small services, adaptable ways and a capacity for relieving others of unwelcome duties, she could

## Committed to his Charge

win temporary resting places. Then she dropped anchor, sure of quiet occupancy if not always positive welcome, with a girlhood friend who had married successfully. Here, in a room at the top of the house, with one dormer window whence she could see the darting swallows dip into chimneys several feet below her eyrie, and a second window of the skylight kind that let in a stray branch of the Virginia creeper which covered the house, she lived out the portion of her life not spent in Church or school-house. The successors of the three-legged chair and broken crockery adorned the rag-carpeted floor and sloping walls, and the ashes of Dorothy and Jerusha glowed again in her love for the members of her infant class. She was not beautiful enough for a picture, nor to step within the covers of a book, but she was beautiful enough to love, and to wish—Oh, God! how devoutly—to be loved. This night, when the excitement of a vestry-meeting had culminated in a choice of pastor, Dulcie let down her long and still beautiful hair, and brushed it to a mirror-brightness like unto the glass opposite. Her small, twinkling eyes gazed into the pane which twinkled back at her. Then,

## Committed to his Charge

when the smooth coil lay on top of the narrow head, she drew her Bible and prayer-book towards her, opening the former at words of mercy, love and patience. Closing the book and sinking to her knees, with a grace of which she was unaware, she mechanically repeated those formulas whose beauties sometimes are bereft of force by those who use them. As she knelt she smoothed out the wrinkles on her closed eyelids, with hands which showed traces of past labour. Then began one of those nightly panoramic processions which always closed her day of small excitements. Before her mental vision passed in review her own virtues and the faults of her friends. There are hypocrites and hypocrites. There are some who begin life in that *rôle*, and by dint of daily practice in virtues they fain would be thought to possess end by really owning them; others begin humbly, but finding the race for sanctity as numerous entered for as any other, adopt, little by little, false aids towards a quick arrival at the goal. Properly, Dulcie belonged to neither class. She was simply an actress in a scene of country parochial life which to her was a stage. She was a mute, inglorious Bernhardt,

## Committed to his Charge

because Slowford, not Paris, had been her destination. With her a pastor-choosing was a serious affair, for on the man, be he bad or good, would she pour out all the treasures of her forgotten heart. Her ear was naturally tuned to ever listen for a husband's footstep. And she had listened so long. At last she went into bed, and rested there with a long sigh of content. The day's doing chased themselves through her mind in that last kaleidoscope of thought, when the impulses of one action and the result of another make the strange mingling which precedes the start and fall into space that in their turn herald sleep. Last faint ejaculations of piety escaped her; over all was a serene sense of well-doing and security in Divine benediction. A children's picnic arranged, a stab at another woman well planted, a neglected baby baptized, a hoarded ten-cent piece bestowed, the train laid to find out something it was never her business to know—was there ever such a jumble of the good and the bad? Something accomplished, something done, had earned a night's repose.

## CHAPTER II

### THE GUILD

THE Women's Guild sat in full conclave. The new Rector had been installed for weeks now fast passing into months, and opinion thus far had been held in suspense. After reading himself in he had given two sermons every Sunday, appropriate to the season and of sufficient variety in subject, and sound enough in doctrine to satisfy those wishing to be dubbed "High," as well as those who, as "Low," said they required "spiritual sustenance."

In this period of the Church's history, under twenty years ago, the Guild covered all small societies, whether the work were domestic or foreign. The congregation had been sitting under the Reverend Caleb Short, nominally; practically, the Reverend Caleb Short had been sitting under the Guild. To-day, bales were to be got ready for the great Algonquin mission, and the forces were assembled. This was too good an opportunity for comparison and debate

## Committed to his Charge

to let slip; so, little by little, with many diplomatic beginnings made by those who were determined to give things an airing, the Rector, his sermons and his views, the Rector's wife, their children, the Rectory, were put through the mill. At times conversation drifted into other channels, but inevitably it came back to the subject of all absorbing interest.

Mrs. Lyte, small, fair, and kindly, held her needle up high to thread it, looked along the line of her spectacles, focussed the steel and put the thread through after many ineffectual dabs.

"He seems awfully in love with his wife."

"Whose wife else would he be in love with?" snapped Mrs. Forby, the dragon of the parish, and out-and-out the best and most useful woman in it—but also owning a tongue from which people turned instinctively as from a flame.

"Nobody's, nobody's," Mrs. Lyte hastened to explain. Then a human kind of wish for retaliation made her add, "but it is more than can be said for every man."

This meant that Mr. Forby was not as attentive as he might be to his wife, and that everyone knew it. But Mrs. Forby had a bold way of her own of checkmating.

## Committed to his Charge

"I should not wonder but every woman gets as much as she deserves that way."

"Then," said Mrs. Lyte, "our new lady at the Rectory must be very sweet indeed, very sweet indeed," and she smoothed out a chemise or two intended for some little Indian's outfit. She handed her bundle to Mrs. Lindsay, who packed as the others mended. Mrs. Lindsay folded them, and turned attention to the sermon of the day before.

"Beautiful, wasn't it? But there are those who say it a was vile plagarism, whatever that may be—some heresy, no doubt. You are never sure of pure doctrine these times, with their High and Low, and stuff."

"Plagiarism!" gently corrected a slight, graceful woman, with deep grey eyes, dressed in a faded black silk. This was Mrs. Stuart, a widow with an only son of whom she was justly proud, whose attainments she was never tired of rehearsing, and with whom she grew daily deeper in love. She spoke with the dignity of knowledge, not pausing in her work.

"It is not heresy, it is only copying, and that is scarcely a sin—and, I am afraid, neither High nor Low. My son says his sermon was got



## Committed to his Charge

from the poet Wordsworth." Mrs. Stuart's cloak of humility, in the sleeve of which she often laughed, covered much knowledge.

Mrs. Lindsay had a son just as sharp as Mrs. Stuart's, but she had not the modesty of the other mother. She was ever ready to plunge into any subject, and in any language.

"That's it," she cried, "that's the man! *Imitations of Morality* was the name of the piece. That's it, but the title had gone clean out of my head. If you want heresy worse'n that I'd like to know where you'd find it."

Mrs. Stuart cleared her throat and essayed an explanation. Mrs. Lindsay scarcely paused.

"No," dropping her work to think, "that wasn't it neither—it was *Intimations of Immorality*—I quite clearly remember the *In* and the *Im*. Now that I come to think of it, maybe it was *Invitations*! I always felt sure he was a bad man."

Now it was known in the parish that, short a time as the Rector had been in office, Mrs. Lindsay had no love for him. He was a man ready with rebuke where he considered it necessary, using his position schoolmaster-wise, and more than once she had managed to fall

## Committed to his Charge

foul of him. So now her companions could not tell whether her remark applied to him or to the poet. They all looked up to hear what might follow; but she did not so commit herself. Her hands fell idly in her lap, and her eye squinted in a retrospective way.

"My mind misgave me for a moment, but I'm sure that's right. Yes, Intimations of Immortality—and that is the man we are to sit under for the rest of our mortal lives. God keep us! He looks to me as if he might be an Englishman with a *Past!*"

If she had said "an Englishman with horns and a tail," her tone could not have conjured up more possibilities.

"Englishman with a fiddlestick," said Mrs. Forby; "why should an Englishman have a past any more than any other man."

"No reason in the world," was the reply: "they've all got 'em right enough; but an Englishman's is likely to be a trifle spicier, that's all," and she returned with vehemence to her folding and packing.

If there was one friend more than another whom Mrs. Forby would not "put up with," it was Mrs. Lindsay. Mrs. Forby knew just

## Committed to his Charge

enough herself to dislike the idea that anyone else could know more. So Mrs. Lindsay having, as it were, challenged the company, Mrs. Forby took up the glove.

"A very fine man, very fine man indeed, and, as Mrs. Lyte so happily put it, so in love with his wife. Dear little children, too. Four under five. Dear me! and when Mr. Forby asked him if there wasn't a pair of twins he said, so pleasantly—'Oh no, just came in the usual way'—so bright and cheerful!"

"I wonder how bright and cheerful *she* is over it," and Mrs. Lindsay's red face loomed up like a moon over the side of a packing-case. "It's easy for men to be cheerful." Another prod at the fast filling box. "I do think, in these days of improvement and electricity and what not, it is awful that women have got to go on just the same as ever."

Mrs. Forby laughed, an unusual thing.

"A kind of electrical baby, I suppose."

"No—o. Not exactly that. But some way of peopling the world more comfortable than the old way."

"Now you are blasphemous," said Mrs. Forby, relapsing into habitual sternness.

## Committed to his Charge

"Well, women want a rest. I don't suppose you deny that?"

"A pretty way they go about it, wanting to vote and take up men's work as well as their own."

Mrs. Lindsay was a widow and had a vote in municipal matters. There were dark rumours that she had exercised her right, and therefore in the eyes of the Guild she had unsexed herself.

She glanced about to see who might be listening.

"What about Miss Sweeting?" she whispered.

"Well, what about her?" Mrs. Forby was prepared to go either way, as determined for her by Mrs. Lindsay's answer.

"Well," said the latter, "I once heard you make the elegant remark that you hated a He-She, and to my mind Miss Sweeting is not far off that pattern. All she needs is ordination and a low-crowned hat."

Mrs. Forby had no particular love for Miss Sweeting. Indeed, there had been times when she wished that that excellent spinster would mind her own business and leave her to do the same. The legend ran that she had so expressed herself to Miss Sweeting's face. But Mrs. Lind-

## Committed to his Charge

say was a woman who in Mrs. Forby's opinion required any amount of sitting upon, and to do Mrs. Forby justice, as far as opportunity was afforded her, Mrs. Lindsay got it.

"Miss Sweeting is a most estimable woman," she said, laying down her work and adjusting her spectacles in a way which heralded a long address—"a most estimable woman, and this parish will never be able to repay her what she has done. You needn't put up your eyebrows that way. She *is* a good woman, and her very faults or failings—some of them—come of her being a good woman. When I say *good*"—this severely—"I mean a *womanly* woman. *She* doesn't want to vote. Her silliness with the last curate, and everything else silly that she has done, comes from what is legitimate longing in every good woman, longing for wifehood, for motherhood, for a home, for all the things *we* have and *she* hasn't." She paused, evidently not finished, and no one had nerve to interrupt. "She *was* an awful fool, though, with that last curate," and Mrs. Forby relapsed into retrospect of the curate's last month in office. "I have watched her day in and day out, when she stays with Mrs. Lucy. You can see the drive-way

## Committed to his Charge

right up to the door from our dining-room window. She would watch for him, in that pale blue gown of hers, all smiles and welcome, and mincing her words—I could *see* her mince. I caught her pulling a dandelion to bits one day, and I'll be bound she was going through 'he loves me, he loves me not.'"

Everyone laughed, even Miss Sweeting's best friends.

"I guess it was more likely 'he cometh not, she said.' Surely she never thought he could love her," said Mrs. Lyte. "Why, he might have been her son!"

"There isn't anything of a He-She in all that, though," concluded Mrs. Forby, going back to the nettling part of Mrs. Lindsay's remark. "She's too sweetly feminine when a curate's about, even for me. But work—I'd like to know where the Sunday school, or the sick, or the poor, or the choir, or anything would have been all the years of the dear Rector's illness—and the dreadful times we put in with those curates—if it hadn't been for her. All the same, it is a mercy we've got a married man now."

"I don't see you have said anything to make us admire her more than we did," said Mrs.

## Committed to his Charge

Lindsay. "And why does she stay so much at the Lucys'? Oh, I know the excuse, because her brother lives so far out of town. But the truth is the same house won't hold her and any of her own relations. When things get too hot they just pack her off to the Lucys'. And I don't care who knows I say so."

"I wonder how she came to be christened that strange name—Dulcissima."

"Her mother was a queer, sentimental kind of thing," said Mrs. Forby. "It was her doing. Means something pretty near Molasses, doesn't it?"

Mrs. Lindsay announced, "It's Italian and superlative. We've got an Ollendorf——"

"Ollendorf?" said Mrs. Lyte, looking up. "That's French. I learned Ollendorf at school."

"It's Italian, too," contended Mrs. Lindsay; "my Jim has the whole of them. German, too. Well, Ollendorf says the c like that in Italian is sounded like sh, so I suppose her name *ought* to be Dulshishima."

"Shish your grandmother," said Mrs. Forby with vigour. She was losing patience again.

"No, I won't neither, it's there to read for yourself if you like. With those books you

## Committed to his Charge

could go over Europe in four or five different languages.”

“Thank the Lord I have the sense to stay at home and hold my tongue in English,” was Mrs. Forby’s retort.

“Marion Crawford would not agree with you there.” Mrs. Stuart had a friend in a large publishing house, and it was one of her few pleasures to receive a package from him. Such a friend was a god-send to a dweller in Slowford who was not Slowford born. True, they had a bookseller, but when an enterprising publisher sent a poster setting forth the merits of some new work, it was his custom to raise a pair of soft black eyes to the inquiring would-be purchaser, and say, “Oh, no, we haven’t the book, we only have the poster.” But Mrs. Stuart was a lady of a lively wit, albeit she hid it from Slowford. Anticipating Pedro, she called the bookseller a knowledge-stopper, and got her reading matter elsewhere. The last package had contained “Saracinesca” and George Eliot’s “Life” by Cross. It was her habit to keep a book near her as she worked, read a sentence or two, do more work, and ruminate as she worked. Mrs. Lindsay had little taste that way. She read



## Committed to his Charge

a certain kind of literature procurable at all circulating libraries, and she had a trick of taking down the Encyclopædia, her Ollendorfs and books of reference, when nothing more exciting offered. The jumble of information thus acquired, when newly assorted and partially assimilated, was given out liberally to her friends. Mrs. Forby despised books, and thought reading a waste of time; she subscribed to two or three Home Journals, but confined herself to the columns treating of garden, kitchen and needlework. She read the editorials in the local papers, but scorned the foreign news.

“I hardly ever read their politics,” she once said; “what do I care so long as the Tories remain in? Of course, there is always ‘Mothers Column,’ and ‘Fancies for the Breakfast-table’—I don’t miss *them*. What do I care whether the Czar is at Gotschina or Peterhof—if my eye was caught by Czar-on-toast it would be a different matter. The poor man seems to be in hot water most of the time. I do like the Princess of Wales, though; I wish they would put in columns about *her*.”

Now, when Mrs. Stuart mentioned Marion Crawford, Mrs. Forby pricked up her ears.

## Committed to his Charge

The name conveyed to her the idea of a stranger come among them. When strangers did come it was always a time of excitement and speculation until it was decided whether they joined "the bankers and that lot" or the "church set," of which last-named Mrs. Forby, Mrs. Lindsay and Mrs. Lyte were the leaders and governors.

"Marion Crawford—what of her? What should she know about it—I haven't heard of her. A man? Marion! Whatever *was* his mother thinking of?—some silly goose of a woman like Dulcie's mother, maybe. Well, I thought George Eliot queer enough for a woman, but I don't wonder *she* wanted to hide herself—I have read quite a bit about *her*." The emphasis of Mrs. Forby's remarks was not favourable to the gifted author. "I never could read the books of a woman like that—no, never!"

Mrs. Stuart knew "Silas Marner" by heart, and was then deep in the biography. She shifted uneasily in her chair, but said nothing.

"And this Marion Crawford—he writes, too, I suppose," continued Mrs. Forby. "It does seem to me such a flying in the face of nature mixing 'em up like that. *Male and female*

## Committed to his Charge

created He them. Do the creatures never read their Bible, I wonder?"

"Her husband represents her as fond of her Bible; George Eliot's biography shows her to be a good woman, knowing a good deal."

Mrs. Stuart's tone was ironical and had a trifle of temper in it, for George Eliot was one of her divinities.

"Husband! She's got no husband," said Mrs. Forby. "I dont know much about her—I don't want to know, but I do know that much."

Mrs. Stuart walked to the window. She said she was tired and wanted to stretch her back. She lived very much apart, and sometimes it pleased her vanity to remember that she so lived. "If I could but tell Alec," she said to herself, as she looked out on the sloping church green and the tussocks on 'Kippan's Island' standing up from it defiantly crooked; "but I dare not—it would be all through the High School by noon, and who could blame him? If George Eliot could but hear these people—or Dickens—they *deserve* a Dickens." She had a note-book at home, in whose bosom might be found many Slowford sayings and her own comments on people and things. She laughed now, as she

## Committed to his Charge

thought of the pages she would fill that evening. She often drew a malicious pleasure from giving her acquaintances a "starter," so she gave them one now as she returned to her sewing.

"They say our Rector was quite a famous lecturer down the country. His series on Shakespeare was noticed in all the city papers."

"He had better confine himself to his sermons *here*," said Mrs. Lyte in a warning way.

"Oh, I don't suppose there's much harm in Shakespeare." Mrs. Forby meant to be liberal in saying so, and having so demolished George Eliot she could afford to be friendly to Shakespeare.

"For those who like something different," continued Mrs. Stuart, "he has given some on philosophy and—oh, lots of things. The *Canadian Review* repeated the whole of his lecture on Kant."

Mrs. Forby brightened at that. "Ah, *there's* something sensible—I hope he'll give that here, no place wants it worse, in my opinion."

Mrs. Stuart looked up with a wicked gleam in her grey eyes. "Yes but his was different from the Slowford cant. This one is spelt with a K."

Cant spelt with a *K!*" cried Mrs. Forby, "*I*

## Committed to his Charge

don't pretend to be literary, but I know how to spell."

A convulsion in a packing-case discharged Mrs. Lindsay, who testily remarked that she didn't see what the bother was about, as most of 'em were dead anyway. Mrs. Lyte puckered her forehead and tried hard to think; she did not trust Mrs. Stuart.

Mrs. Lindsay laboured at a pun—"It can't be done—you can't spell cant with a K." Mrs. Stuart longed towards the sympathy denied from Alec, but vouchsafed no information. Mrs. Lyte determined to hunt up cant with a K as soon as she should reach home. Mrs. Lindsay's next remark seemed to have some relation in her own mind to the word discussed.

"I wonder what has become of Miss Sweeting. She has been at the Rectory all afternoon telling them about our At Home, and getting the new list made out, so that nobody will be forgotten."

The Guild had decided at its last meeting to have an entertainment of the kind hitherto called a Social, which should embrace every member of the parish. It was to be called an At Home, meaning that all who came to it were at home to their new Rector and his wife. As if summoned

## Committed to his Charge

to defend herself, Miss Sweeting stood in the doorway—not an unpleasing figure, small, slight and neat, old-maidish to a degree, her bright hair streaked with grey, an all but pretty woman. There was an unpleasant twinkling in her eyes, and her mouth was pinched. Simultaneously all work was dropped in lap, and those in the rear pressed forward.

Mrs. Forby greeted her. "It must have been a long list to keep you all afternoon."

"I was doing more than that." There was an air of being able to impart information, but of doubt as to the expediency of so doing. This little old maid always appeared to know more than any one else of the matter in hand—that she *could* tell you all about it if she would, and if she thought it good for you to know. There was always present a sense of being entirely at her mercy and discretion.

"The character of the entertainment has entirely changed, and I have been addressing envelopes all afternoon—and they are posted—we posted them on the way up." "We" always meant Miss Sweeting and the reigning incumbent.

"Posted!"

## Committed to his Charge

"Addressed!" came in gasps from some of the hearers.

"But *we* meant to invite through the papers and through the *Parish Magazine*," said Mrs. Forby, "and what's more, we will."

"The *Magazine* notice was given in this morning, and our cakes all promised," added Mrs. Lindsay.

"Mine's made—a plum," said Mrs. Forby. "Well, go on Dulcie. What else have you and the new man been pleased to do with us?"

Miss Sweeting smiled her draw-string smile and twinkled, while Mrs. Forby beat the floor with her foot.

"It was not I—I had nothing to do but direct envelopes."

"Only envelopes?" queried Mrs. Forby, with deadly quiet.

"The Rector has decided that he and Mrs. Huntley, not the Guild, shall be At Home on that evening, and the invitations run that way. He struck them off on his typewriter—or rather she did. They say the refreshment arrangements can stand just as they were. It will not put anyone out, or need not," she added, at a withering glance from Mrs. Forby.

## Committed to his Charge

"*He* may be At Home on that evening," said the latter, "but so shall I and my plum cake—eight pounds of it! At home on our cake and tea, indeed! I think I see them, or myself either—well, *did* you ever!" and she turned to the circle about her where the members sat petrified, and with work laid aside, each trying to frame her mind to the new position.

"I must say," said Mrs. Lyte, who was always the mildest of the trio, "I never did like the way he will come poking into our meetings and opening and closing for us, when we have done for ourselves all these years."

"Yes, and making her President, first go off."

"*Honorary* President," corrected Mrs. Forby, as one who should say, "Over this dead body first."

"Well then, honorary. To be sure, she never opens her mouth but to talk to some of the younger women about her babies. Why, one night you were not here, and the Rector away too, would you believe it—she couldn't say the Lord's Prayer!"

"Oh, come now."

"True, isn't it?" and Mrs. Lindsay turned to the circle for corroboration. Most members of the Chapter wagged their heads solemnly.



## Committed to his Charge

"True in a way," said Mrs. Stuart. "She is nervous, poor thing, and very young. And her family is very young," she pleaded in further extenuation.

"Most families are, at some period of their existence," snapped Mrs. Lindsay. "I won't go as far as Mrs. Forby and keep my cake—goodness knows I don't begrudge them a cake or two. *But, if we say we are going to be at home in our own school-house on a certain evening, I don't see why he—and she—and you,*" turning to Miss Sweeting, "should go and send out invitations such as these. Show them me"—and she held out her hand for the bundle of notes in Miss Sweeting's claw-like little fingers.

THE RECTOR and MRS. HUNTLEY

AT HOME

ON WEDNESDAY Evening, JUNE 20th,

IN ALL SAINTS' SCHOOL HOUSE.

"Very much at homè, indeed—nothing bashful about them! Well, what does everybody think?"

"As for At Homes," said Mrs. Forby, "I, for one, don't hold with the custom. In this case they are not at home, but are in the school-house. And as for a woman printing such a

## Committed to his Charge

statement about herself on a card, I should like to know where she *would* be if not at home?"

Everyone had something to say, but the majority decided that the man meant well, and that it would never do in these early days to seem resentful.

"It strikes me," said Mrs. Lyte, "that he finds himself in a position entirely new, and doesn't quite know what to do."

"Yes, and bound to do something—he's boiling with energy. Exactly. Never was a Rector before, and thinks we are literally his sheep, to be driven this way and that."

"He's like a dog with two tails and trying to wag 'em both at once," said Mrs. Forby.

Everybody laughed. "A finger in every pie," added Mrs. Lindsay. "Just you watch Carney on Sunday." Mr. Carney was the organist. "Mr. Huntley is bound to do the choosing of the hymns, and he has begun at the tunes and the chants now. When you see Carney come out and hunch his ears up in his coat collar, and sit with his legs stiff and without getting on the bench till the bell's stopped, then you may know there's been battle, murder and sudden death in the vestry. And now he says the organ wants

## Committed to his Charge

fixing, that he won't rest until he has added a Nox Vomica——"

"Good Gracious, Mrs. Lindsay," said Mrs. Forby, putting the key in the door, "is the man a homœopathist too?"

Mrs. Stuart laughed outright; no one had ever heard her do so before.

"Well, I'm no musician," Mrs Lindsay admitted goodnatureedly; "Miss Sweeting here is, you can ask her—Peter told me about the stop."

But Miss Sweeting had distributed her notes and, content with having achieved a purpose unknown to and in defiance of the whole Guild, had quietly gone home.

Mrs. Forby turned a wrathful countenance toward the crowd of women; since Dulcie had escaped she would make a vicarious sacrifice of someone, no matter which one.

"That ridiculous old Peter—Nux vomica—I suppose he means *vox humana*."

"Perhaps it is—I daresay," said Mrs. Lindsay, with an accent of *cont-care*. A wicked desire to expose her friend seized Mrs. Forby.

"And what does *nux vomica* mean? Isn't there a Latin Ollendorf?"

## Committed to his Charge

"No, I heartily wish there were," said the other, falling into the trap; "a bit of Latin is sometimes so effective—explicit, you know."

"Particularly when you don't know what it means."

"Oh, but I do—Nox, night, anybody knows that much—Vomica, er—er—ill in the night, I suppose."

"We will spare you further details," and Mrs. Forby let the rest file out, drawing the door to behind her. "As you say, Latin is handy on occasions—and you can go up head."

Once free of the listeners, before whom she would not expose Dulcie, for she remembered her championship of an hour before, Mrs. Forby, permitted herself a remark to her two intimates.

"That little cat Dulcie is at the bottom of the whole thing."

They parted at Mrs. Forby's gate, where her husband, lifting the latch, performed the unwonted civility of letting her in. The others were by this time at a safe distance.

"I do wish that Mrs. Lindsay would confine herself to subjects she understands."

"Lord love you, Maria, would you have the woman go dumb?"

## Committed to his Charge

But the question was not answered, for the pan left by the mistress's own capable fingers ready for the oven, with a spotless cloth over an edible which looked toothsome even in rawness, now gave forth odours telling of a forgotten committal to the fire, of a pine blaze to hurry matters, and an already scorching carcass. Into the blue smoke which invaded the sacred front of her house Mrs. Forby disappeared, and until she drove in scorched maid and food before her, did Mr. Forby, between the items of his newspaper and at a safe distance in the verandah, alternate the politics of Europe with thoughts of the far more difficult politics of home and Church as understood by his Maria.

## CHAPTER III

### THE GOSPEL OF HOME

The Reverend Thomas Huntley and his wife were in the study at the Rectory. All day they had played tennis on the lawn on which their drawing-room windows gave. The beginning of the week had seen forty-two parochial visits made, two country sermons delivered, and every sick person in the town comforted. To-morrow morning, Saturday, would be devoted to standing in the market-place, for Slowford was a market town of considerable importance, and on Saturday mornings every farmer from several ridings might be found upon the Square. The good farmers were not quite so picturesque in summer as in winter. In January you might see the Laird MacWillie clothed in the skins of beasts, his coat rivalling Joseph's in variety if not in brightness, his hat fashioned from a coon whose tail, reversed, wagged in a way to account for the expression of the wall eye beneath it. There was his neighbour, Donald McIntyre, who scorned

## Committed to his Charge

Canadian clothing and stuck to a plaid which crossed and re-crossed his ample bosom, his head covered with a blue bonnet from his former home, surmounted by a knob of a different shade but as red as the locks beneath; the latter were fiery, the former inclined to vermilion, and the two made a fine contrast in reds. There were Irish farmers in old broad-cloth, long-tailed coats a mile too wide in the shoulders, and the garment below them a mile too wide and too long in the seat. These men were clean shaven, with black-pitted cheeks and sunken, twinkling eyes; the underlip of each fell to one side from the pressure of the never-absent clay pipe, and thin, small withered hands held themselves as if perpetually fingering tobacco. The head-gear was generally an old silk hat which had been industriously rubbed, sometimes the wrong way, harbouring quantities of dust in summer and of snowflakes in winter. On stormy days the beloved beaver relic was replaced by a tightly-fitting fur cap with ears tied securely under the chin, and the pipe seemingly tied up with it. There were ruddy English farmers, too, with traces of Somerset and Devon in their speech, generally with something disparaging to say of

## Committed to his Charge

the new land or a growling reminiscence of zummat that was different in the "hould coontree."

The Rector had parishioners everywhere, but his Irish were of a different cast from those of beaver and tail-coats; his had large heads with curly manes, and knotted hands, looking like the Scotch, and every man Orange. In the old days of the first settlers there had been battles royal betwixt the Scotch and Irish, the former fortifying themselves from their snuff-boxes, the latter with shillaleghs, both with whiskey. But the Orange-Irish got on with his Scotch neighbour; all he bargained for was to be free of the little men in broadcloth and silk hats. And the latter were only too glad to be free of them, for the Orange were powerful and bitter enemies. An Orangeman made a will wherein he bargained that no Roman should be buried within one hundred feet of him, for all time. One of the little old men of the dudheen kind had been persecuted by the maker of the will till it could be borne no longer, and the little man's last defence was shrewd. His primitive dwelling of logs, lean-to, thatch and planking, was never free from attacks, so he painted it green, a vivid, national green. He argued correctly; for instead



## Committed to his Charge

of razing the dwelling, as another might have feared would be the result, the enemy passed by on the other side and would not touch the accursed thing. But the Romish wife, the little Irishwoman with face the size of a watch, keen black eyes set near together and skin tanned like an Indian's, could make revenge like a practical religionist. One day she was seated in her green cabin, a marvel of cleanliness and poverty-stricken neatness. Her white, double-bordered cap fitted closely round the small, wizened face; she was clad in her best black gown, and on a chair near by lay her drawn and corded black bonnet and summer shawl. Suddenly a cat of startling orange hue stood in the doorway, its stripes gaining brilliancy from the hot sun-rays pouring in through the opening behind it. The pot, ready for the potatoes, boiled and hissed on the brisk wood fire.

“Bad scran to yez for a divil of a Prodestant cat,” and Mrs. McCaffrey had poor pussy in the pot, the lid held firmly down.

When the Reverend Thomas Huntley heard of the last addition to the roll of martyrs he laughed heartily. He had yet to learn what such bitterness meant.

## Committed to his Charge

Among people such as this his Saturday morning would be spent. Saturday afternoons were taken up in revising old sermons or writing new ones. It was one of the former that owed its existence to "Intimations of Immorality."

This Friday, then, between the two active portions of the week, had been devoted to tennis and much innocent merriment. Ann and her four charges had spent most of the time on the verandah within sight, and at odd times the children—those who could walk—had come down to run after the balls, to be kissed, to tumble about with Ponto and Jim and Ginger, to have a jump on Daddy's high shoulder, feeling themselves a part of that happy time. As Mrs. Forby and others had divined, the pleasure of the sense of possession was new and keen to the Rector.

The cloudless June day drew to a close with a chill, and the study fire was lighted. Helen Huntley placed a small table in front of the blaze, and put upon it a smoker's necessities and four packs of cards.

"I don't see why we shouldn't close the day as we have spent it—enjoying ourselves."

## Committed to his Charge

"That is a nice declaration of opinion for a clergyman's wife," said Huntley, but at the same time he began to arrange the cards for dealing.

"Oh, well, to-morrow is a work-day again. There are your slippers, dear. What was our score last time? I won—I remember that."

"Trust you not to forget a fact of that kind," laughed her husband, as he gave the burning log a kick to send it farther into the fireplace.

"It is a good rule to remember the pleasant and forget everything else—that is one of your favourite preachments, in the pulpit and out. Deal me a good hand, there's a duck. I am so thankful that that At Home is over—and so well over. How nicely everything went, not a hitch. Even Mrs. Forby was amiable and smiled," and Helen's own smile broadened into a laugh.

"She makes a good plum cake, I know that," said the Rector. "We must have enough cake in the house for another At Home, I should think—if we were so minded."

"Yes, niggardliness in the matter of cake can never be laid to their charge; I wanted it sent to the House of Refuge, but Mrs. Lindsay wouldn't hear of it—she said that House of

## Committed to his Charge

Refuge got more than it deserved. She and Peter are the Mal-a-pros of the town. Four queens—a sequence. You had better light your pipe and keep your spirits up, Mr. Huntley. Cake—I should think so. It was an awfully happy thought of Miss Sweeting's, though. We never could have managed without meeting them all, and we couldn't have accommodated a quarter of them here. Besides, think of the carpets. I wonder how she managed the Guild,—she is a wonderful little thing.”

“Then you do think that even a Rector's hospitality has its limits?”

“We never could have them *here*, for instance.”

Tom looked round the snug elegance of his study, and shuddered. It was as if tramps and a drunkard or two had been suggested in his sanctuary.

“Certainly not!”

“Tom!”

“Well?”

“I think—perhaps—parish life will improve you.”

“Thanks awfully.”

“Don't, dear. What I mean is, you will probably become more human.”

## Committed to his Charge

"Thanks still more awfully."

"Well, you may laugh, but, you know, I think that the Rector's home, as a rule, is the most selfish place to be found in the parish. I do, indeed. You preached to the boys fairly well, but you played cricket with them much better. Now, on Sunday evening last, although I object on principle to sermons of that sort—don't interrupt—you did stand face to face with those about you. It was the first time I ever heard you speak straight from your heart."

"Helen!"

"Oh, well, of course I mean from the pulpit. If you could only always do that, Tom."

"Well, you sit below the pulpit in that pink bonnet, and I'll try."

"Don't be flippant, dear."

"And what, pray, did you object to on principle? That I likened life to a land over which the locusts have gone? You don't know——"

"Tom, what is the use of going through life with head over shoulder like Lot's wife,—always the past, the past?"

"Dear heart, you know not of what you speak."

## Committed to his Charge

"But I do."

"But you don't. The majority of us wake up at thirty, at thirty-five we chant "too late," and at forty the worm begins."

"You are forty—I see no worm."

"You scotched him long ago."

"I'm glad it was him, not her."

The Rector turned to the fire and gave the logs a kick, a fresh shower of sparks rewarding his vigour.

"You are a different man, out of and in your own house," said his wife, returning to the attack. "I always think you lock your heart behind you when you close the hall door."

"This is worse than having one's hand read by a palmist."

"It is necessary—for your own good, my dear, as you sometimes say to poor Punch."

"Oh, I don't mind; fire away. It is pleasant to spend one's time with a lady who never looks forward and who never looks back. There is great flattery to the male in the attitude."

"What does it matter what one *has* had, or what one is going to have—I want it *now*," and Helen's needle gave a vicious stab.

"Your practice is pleasant, dear, I bask in the

## Committed to his Charge

light of your smiles and sweetness; but as for morals, conscience, philosophy—whew!”

“Tom!”

“Well?”

“Don't you think the conscience is like the back, it gets fitted to its burden?”

He looked fixedly at her for a moment.

“What makes you ask me that?”

“Nothing. But what is the use of a sermon like that—*revenons à nos moutons*, otherwise congregation—for to the people with a past it is too late, and the younger ones won't listen to you.”

“Evidently.”

“Oh, but I did. Every word of it. And I watched the people. It was only the elderly ones who listened. The young faces were vacant or inattentive. I saw that pretty Alice—Alice what's-her-name, leaning back and counting something, the patterns in the chancel ceiling, perhaps, and the girl beside her was as usual grinning at some one in the congregation—and——”

“If you call the lovely Edith's smile a grin it is you who are hardened.”

“No, give me Eyes Front for a text.”

## Committed to his Charge

"Not Biblical. Nor yet Let Bygones be Bygones."

"Well, then—Let the Dead Past bury its Dead."

"Helen!" Huntley walked round the room and back to his place. "Do you really mean it?"

"I really do."

A long pause was only broken by the crackle of the fire and the clicking of Helen's scissors.

"It is sometimes hard to hit it off with these people," went on the Rector, as he struck another match. "Now the other evening you were as sweet as a peach and said the right thing—I thought—every time but once—I could see Mrs. Forby expected you to say something which you didn't, and there was an ominous silence between you."

"I suppose I said nothing," said Helen, laying her pretty head back against the cushions, "simply because I had nothing to say."

"Having nothing to say is a state of mind and tongue Mrs. Forby could never understand, and it would be useless to try to explain. They seem a busy, fussy lot, and they like plenty of talk—I can easily see that."



## Committed to his Charge

The fire hissed, the game went on, baby cried and the young mother sped up the staircase. From above soon came the sound of soft crooning, a hushing that rose over the fretful wail, then silence. The Rector lay back in his easy chair, contentment and the light of great happiness in his face. As Mrs. Lyte had remarked, he was awfully in love with his wife.

Swift footsteps were heard coming down the staircase, and he turned his gaze to where the bright young face paused within the shadow of the *portiere*.

"Ah, I thought I should catch you napping, and I do so need a pair of new gloves. Don't let's play any more. It's too much like work after such a hard day at tennis—let's talk Parish. Give that fire a poke. It is melting warm, but it does look so nice. Make it blaze—June! think of it, and how good the blankets will feel to-night. Now Tom, put those cards *neatly* in the box, not all higgledy-piggledy—what a tiresome stupid—you old dear," and she stooped over the chair to give him a peck.

He drew the pretty face down to his. "I think our lines have fallen in pleasant places, love. I think we shall get on."

## Committed to his Charge

"Get on—and why not?"

She snapped to the lid of the card box, then drew her work basket towards her, put her feet on the fender and made preparation for comfort with employment. She sewed at some tiny garment, love worked in with every stitch as eye rested on husband or thought travelled to the row of cribs overhead.

"I'll tell you what, Tom—it is a thousand pities you gave up your cassock. Between us and the light your legs aren't handsome, either."

The Rector shook his head. "Remember the fate of the Orange cat. If I had been caught in a cassock I might have gone pop into the Kippan potato-pot. No, I grudged it, and felt precious awkward at first, but it is better not to court that kind of trouble."

"Court your grandmother," irreverently.

"I preferred to court her grand-daughter."

They laughed; hearty, innocent laughter at their own jokes.

"You must be careful how you quote Mrs. Forby; one cannot see the quotation marks in speech. It sounds as if you were taking liberties with our own grandmother. God rist *her* sowl, as Mrs. McCaffrey said to me to-day when talk-

## Committed to his Charge

ing of the old Rector, 'and the free, pleasant man he was, not a bit like a Prodestant.'"

"Oh, but you didn't see yourself stalking about that chancel," said Helen, returning to her subject. "Really, last Sunday I made up my mind to send for one or to put a flounce to your petticoat."

"I think we'll leave the garment as it is." He spoke between satisfied puffs at his pipe, sending curls up to the ceiling. "I had so many warnings, and have heard so many tales on both sides, that it behoves me to tread warily. That cat story scared me horribly. I am like to be between the devil and the deep sea. It would be easier to escape Mrs. McCaffrey and her pot than the Kippans and some of the Guild. That institution is on a perpetual look-out for Ritualism. Mr. Low told me they already think too much music is introduced into the service, and that Miss Webb suggested 'Let us sing,' instead of 'Let us pray.' Oh, Miss Webb's solos—and Miss Sweeting's roulades—and poor Carney's extempore playing—and my rival Mrs. Quick—and that dreadful old Webb and his spy-glass—and Peter——"

"Frumps!" said his wife, dismissing Miss

## Committed to his Charge

Webb and airing her own opinions in one word. "I do wish, dear, I could be of some help to you. I felt, and am sure I *looked* like a perfect fool the night they expected me to open the Guild Meeting. I could as easily have said the Lord's Prayer in Greek as in English. I stumbled round in my head for 'God save the Queen,' and 'confound their politics,' but it was no good. What must they have thought?"

"The truth, probably—that you were nervous. There's more kindness in the world than we give it credit for."

"How nice it will be when the girls grow up and can help you." The girls were in their fifth and third years. "This frock is going to be a beauty. I wish I had a hot iron—it's ready to press. But Mary will be in bed and the fire out."

"I am sure Miss Sweeting would help you in any difficulty," said the Rector, ignoring the frock.

Mrs. Huntley pursed her mouth, made slits of her eyes, and looked at her husband deprecatingly.

"I am not sure I want to be helped. I have always an uneasy feeling when she calls that she has come to stay, and that I have not asked her

## Committed to his Charge

according to her expectations. I think, yes—I really think I like Mrs. Forby better, or even, yes, even Mrs. Lindsay.”

“Oh, come now!”

“Well, Miss Sweeting has given me a detailed account of everyone in the parish. I find that most of them have something to be ashamed of. But I am so stupid at remembering that I am sure to tack a scandal to some guiltless person.”

“Forget it all,” said her husband with sudden energy, knocking the ashes out of his pipe. “Forget it all, and don’t try to keep their nasty little histories sorted. I *hate* gossip. Gossip comes of the Devil, and Scandal is from Hell!”

“Good gracious, Tom! This is only Friday, and I’m not a congregation! Don’t preach, dear. It wants a pulpit to make it effective—and your petticoated black legs. Hand me that pair of scissors and stop scowling. Your dear Miss Sweeting *is* a gossip. When I differ or exclaim, she puts her head on one side like a funny little old grandmother-bird, and says, “Who has been longer in this town, you or I?”

“Horrible! I don’t suppose you want to rival her in either longevity or knowledge! Shut her up when you can, and endure her when you

## Committed to his Charge

can't. That is the only advice I can give you. We must make the best of her, and credit her good intention in the main. Selfishness makes one lenient ; and from all I can hear she is a kind of perpetual curate, a walking Parish Directory. She is a very useful person, and I am beginning to wonder what I should do without her."

"Upon my word!—and suppose I begin to determine you *shall* do without her—poor old thing," and Helen laughed, the thoroughly amiable, fearless laugh that a woman, young and pretty, can afford to bestow on one comparatively old and not pretty. "I am not afraid. She does not escape the others though. *They say* she expected that last curate to marry her."

"*That* is Mrs. Lindsay," said the Rector.

"No, Mrs. Forby this time. Indeed, they all like a fling at her. But they let her do lots of work. Mrs. Forby says she has been trying to catch a husband for over twenty years. Odious—the very repetition does sound so vulgar. And of course as time goes on the chances are fewer, and her efforts and despair proportionate."

The Rector laughed his easy, good-natured chuckle. "How like women! Do you remember that story we read in 'Tales from Blackwood?'

## Committed to his Charge

A gruesome one, where the hero was shut up in a chamber that had six or seven windows. Every morning as he lay looking for the light it came through one less till but one was left. Then he knew that on the morrow there would be no light at all, and that his narrowing prison would crush him in darkness for ever. Well, I suppose this curate was her last window—poor soul. Isn't it time you put away that sewing? A small voice is demanding a 'jink'—you may as well go first as last," and he lighted her candle.

"Oh, no, Ann is in, I hear her step."

"Small blame to you for that," said he, as the heavy foot fall threatened to come through the ceiling.

"She is invaluable. The servant question seems to be one of the troubles here. Mrs. Forby has any number of tales. She once had seven in a month—maids, not tails."

"She might have seven in a day, if I were the maids," said the Rector; "a fussy, exacting woman, if I do not mistake. She thinks all the ethics of life lie in a scrubbing brush—her servants are required to sweep like avenging angels. My dear, be a good immigrant, but do not take all the fashions of the place, I beseech you."

## Committed to his Charge

Helen had visions of Mrs. Quick's "cowbite" as it nodded in the front pew.

"I don't think I intend to adopt any of them—I shall stick to my own ways—and milliner. I should as soon copy Mrs. Lindsay's bonnet, or her grammatical construction, as her manner of living. We can surely lead our own lives and keep our position true to them and to our calling, can't we, Tom?"

"Our calling! Hark to her! When were you ordained, Madame?"

"You will yet see that I have as much to do here as you. At the school there was nothing for me but to have the boys to tea now and then, and to comfort the home-sick ones; but here it is different. It brings out latent missionary zeal, and all sorts of things. Listen to Punch. Why doesn't Ann give him his jink?"

The Rector took up the candlestick and held it while she hastily folded back the hearth-rug careful of sparks and mindful of possibly thoughtless housemaid service in the morning. She put up her face for a hurried kiss as she took the candle.

"Don't read too long, dearest. You will get a frown, and look like an old man."



## Committed to his Charge

Again "Jink!" was shrilled from above.

"Coming, darling, mother is coming—and oh, Tom, do see to the cat. She might stay by the fire, and we might find her on baby's chest in the morning!"

"You superstitious goose! You might as well be afraid of the ghost of the martyred Orange puss."

It was half-past ten, a good hour and a half for reading before he, too, went to bed, but he did not seem in any hurry to begin. He took down two or three books, but showed no sign of settling to them until the footsteps overhead had ceased. Then he read and made notes until the cathedral chimes on the mantelpiece struck twelve, when he opened his Greek Testament and read his chapter. Then knelt, his arms resting on the table, his head buried in them, and he prayed.

## CHAPTER IV

### POLITICS VS. RELIGION

NOTHING more truly conservative can be imagined than a Canadian town of the Slowford type.

The Reverend Thomas Huntley thought himself of that school of politics, but in Slowford he found himself progressive to the extent of Radicalism. He arrived there just as a twenty-two years' record had been broken and a Reform candidate sent to Parliament, a return brought about merely because the Tory was unpopular enough to have made some votes change and others go unregistered. However, they but awaited the man and the hour to be on the winning side again.

But what they were politically was not a circumstance to what they were in Church matters and socially. Huntley confided to his wife his opinion that the lines of demarcation between "sets" were rigidly drawn, and were, to the eye of a newcomer, purely arbitrary, without

## Committed to his Charge

birth, education or manners, as precedent for the state of being. There was the large circle, which embraced the entire congregation; within it all met on a common ground, from the Rector's wife to Granny Quick, from Mrs. Lucy to Peter the sexton, and there was a show of mutual good feeling tempered by many democratic utterances on one side and snobbish acts on the other. At periodical teas and ice-cream festivals many eatables and drinkables were consumed, and much money taken from "outsiders" for the support of the Church. These outsiders comprehended "all Jews, Turks, infidels and heretics"; their money was exchangeable, but there their usefulness ceased. There was absolutely no interchange of anything else between the Anglican Church and outside Slowford.

When a foreign clergyman once berated the congregation of All Saints' for not giving more freely, showed them their place compared with other congregations, and described the funds furnished by other denominations for missionary purposes, they took it very hardly. He did not mince matters. He was not accustomed to audiences who would not hear anything unpalat-

## Committed to his Charge

able. He spoke admiringly of the freer spirit manifested by Methodists and Presbyterians when they gave to any church need, particularly when the benefit derived was not for home purposes. He quoted the Jesuits; but he beat the air. "As if," said Mrs. Forby, "there could be a comparison of that kind in bald figures! There are other things to be taken into consideration. We have appearances to keep up, and that costs so—just look at our social obligations! Those people have none whatever." So Mrs. Forby, President of the Guild, continued, with her aides, to furnish the Algonquin Mission with a bale once a year in the way we have seen; there her outside obligations ceased. The foreign clergyman might never have come for any result his words ever had.

But inside the large circle within which outsiders never penetrated farther than to eat and drink at ten cents a plate and five cents a cup, there were two or three smaller ones, each as inaccessible to the other as the large one was to those poor people named in the Collect already quoted. Mr. and Mrs. Lucy were of two sets, Banker and Church, two cliques that made periodical calls upon each other and met at one

## Committed to his Charge

or two so-called social functions during the year—the Lucys' biennial party at which there was whist, followed by music and supper, the Charity Ball, the Hospital Ball, or large gatherings made for the benefit of the Volunteers when those brave soldiers were at camp. But friendships between the sets there were none.

In all the congregation there were but three Liberals. The three belonged to the Bankers' set, and that alone would have settled them with the Church people. "I do not believe," said Mr. Low, the People's Warden, and he truly believed what he said, "I don't believe that a Churchman or a gentleman could be a Grit. If, unhappily, he became one he would, in my estimation, cease to be one and the other." Gladstone and several Canadians were cited to him as distressing examples. "They are no more Liberals or Grits than *I* am," he replied. "They are merely ambitious men using other men as their tools, handling them in masses to serve their own ends; and in order to so handle them, have to pretend to be like them."

Inside the Church set a Reformer could not win, and, in spite of her sex, it was on account of a scandalous suspicion in that direction that

## Committed to his Charge

Mrs. Stuart was left out in the cold. She belonged to no set, and lived a lonely life. Mrs. Lyte once had drawn attention to her quiet manners and pretty speech; but manners and speech did not avail. "It's my opinion," said Mrs. Lindsay, "that she is a decomposed gentlewoman." This startling observation led to a correction administered by Mrs. Forby, but Mrs. Lindsay contended that decomposed and decayed meant much the same after all. "A gentlewoman she could hardly be," declared Mrs. Forby, "for during the last election I heard her say things which would set such a suspicion at rest for ever. No lady could be so un-Conservative."

Naturally, some mistakes made by the Huntleys arose from blindness in points of nicety, from stupidity and lack of appreciation of the gravity of such points. For two years of their lives they were to do little but make mistakes and incur ill-will. To them all seemed alike, some more amusing, some more interesting than others, but in the matter of superiority none able to call his neighbour to account. So, when the Huntleys did strike a balance, it was quite likely to be on the wrong side.

## Committed to his Charge

As has been said, Mrs. Stuart had a gentle, refined voice, and a quiet manner. She read the current literature of a light kind, and, with her boy, had a passing idea of each month's reviews, of the personal and political gossip of the outside world. Above all, she had an inkling that Slowford was not the centre of the universe. She had ambitions for her son, to make him a professional man, to see him in a social position where she herself should be. In a sense she despised the persons whom circumstances had placed socially above her; but she was very human, and often longed for what she despised but could not have. She worked conscientiously in the Guild; but apart from house sewing-meetings or occasional terrible entertainments called Parlour Concerts, where incompetent amateurs displayed their incompet ence in music and elocution for the consideration, paid to a charity, of a "silver collection at the door," Mrs. Stuart saw nothing of the thresholds of her fellows. She would not know those whom she could, and the other members of that mysterious Inquisition called Canadian Society had decided that she could not know those whom she would. How far such decisions arose from a sense of her

## Committed to his Charge

superiority on some points, it would be hard to say.

Mrs. Lyte was a widow of a different caste. She earned her living in several small ways—an occasional boarder, a music-pupil or two, or a lesson in Kensington stitch ; but she never, for herself or her children, lost hold for a moment of the position acquired during her husband's lifetime. By a judicious bestowal of coffee and cake after whist she managed to keep abreast of those who gave suppers. She had lived all the years of her married life in a tumble-down house that every day threatened dissolution, with a pretty bit of garden where the hyacinths were first in spring and where tulips, roses and gladioli, made mysterious appearance, each in its proper season, through a tangle of periwinkle and ground-ivy which covered what once had been borders. The walls, chimneys and roof were weighted with virginia creeper, clematis and hop vines, in a way highly picturesque but which led to gaps and sudden recourse to tubs and other vessels when the skies emptied anything heavier than a summer shower. Inside, the house was a marvel of cheapness and neatness. Seeming decorations covered un-



## Committed to his Charge

sightly gaps; a curtain here, an impromptu bookcase there; things twisted out of original shape to make them fit in untoward circumstances, painted floors, rugs pretending to be Eastern but domestic beyond hope of pretence, lace curtains where darns artfully followed the design, a piano with ivories missing and suggestive of need of a dentist, made up the interior of what was announced by the medium of a gate-post as Dunfillan. The word was on the mistress's card-plate; never an invitation was issued by her without the mystic word in the corner. With the other inhabitants Dunfillan took rank with some old-world Grange or Chace. Not so with the new-comers, those unsatisfactory people who ranked with the Bankers. Some were scoffers, and it happened that one bird-of-passage family, named Delabaugh, alighted and built their nest directly opposite. It was a household of rollicking boys and laughing girls, of abnormal appetites and frequent bread-bakings, and it was not long before the wag of the family had "Never done fillin'" in poker-etching on the gate-post.

Slowford was rich in widows. Mrs. Lindsay

## Committed to his Charge

had, as Mrs. Forby would say, hankering after the New Woman; but she had many attributes of the Old Woman, and one was a power of waiting. She watched for her opportunity, and seized it at the right moment. Her churchmanship, or, according to her own view, her churchwomanship, answered, like everything else, to serve her ends. Her husband had followed some humble occupation at the Works, but on the frail fabric of his once having seen better days, his widow, whose speech alone would have condemned her, built up, little by little, a structure of position, prosperity and general well-being, which did credit to her constructive powers. In it all the Church had been of chief use. Bazaars, teas, Christmas decorations, parlour concerts, sick visiting, had been factors in the fashioning of the structure. She entertained foreign clergy, and in her own turn at being billeted away from home she managed so well that she was sent back as an honoured guest from houses where she had gone as a mere Auxiliary member. Everything served. She manipulated such chances as she did the bones for her soup-kettle and the crumbs which were the groundwork of her famous Queen's

## Committed to his Charge

pudding. Through it all she said "I seen" and "I done" and was the local Mrs. Partington. But if she mispronounced her own words she seldom misinterpreted the actions of others; acute, intelligent, speaking a patois distinctly Canadian as that of the habitant of Canada-en-bas, she was always intelligible and pointed in her utterances. She taught a Sunday-School class and was credited with having satisfied a pupil who was fond of putting awkward questions. The explanation of the name of that Sunday which followed Quinquagesima was new in All Saints': "Why, Quadrille Sunday of course, child. Quin, five; quad, four. Little girls ought to learn their roots, as I did." When another had difficulty in finding a verse Mrs. Lindsay advised her to turn to the Hypocrisy. "She always reminds me," said Mrs. Forby once, "of the time I took my Tommy to the Salt Springs. When I prodded him down in the bath by his shoulders, out would shoot his feet; and vice versa, out would pop his shoulders and head. It is no use trying to keep her down."

Mrs. Forby, good woman, was ridiculous often, but well-meaning always, her bark worse than

## Committed to his Charge

her bite, sometimes saying hard things but invariably doing kind actions, with a hand ever ready to give help, but with a tongue equally ready to give advice. She was alternately president of this or that society, or "out of it altogether" because she would not "put up with" somebody else or because somebody else refused to put up with her. The last did not happen often, for they were all afraid of her, and usually said what they had to say behind her back and at a safe distance.

In the privacy of his own study the Rector had said they were all gossips. But much of what appeared to him to be gossip was but the airing of that tremendous capacity for criticism which exists in small places and which was especially strong in Slowford. In all affairs, Church or social, every point was weighed, and the idea was to arrive at a solution of all problems, be they sermonic or purely domestic. To go to Church, listen, profit, and say nothing, would have seemed a direct waste of opportunity. The omission or rendition of an anthem was sure to give offence to some one; the *Te Deum* was too fast or too slow, the hymns were ill-chosen, or Miss Webb had been flat in her solo.

## Committed to his Charge

Without side issues and discussion religious life would have meant stagnation in Slowford. As for the pulpit, some wanted "Old Testament sermons"; they never tired of the wanderings of the children of Israel or of the slaying of the Amalekites—or, indeed, the slaying of anybody, provided it was terrifying. Others wanted the old, old story, ever new, as it comes in the succession of the Gospels; and a third class wished for a weekly intellectual treat with just enough Bible in it to save conscience-prickings. Where was the man to be found who would furnish enough of each element required to please the different tastes, and yet who would never show partiality or reveal his own bias by undue attention to any one of them! Huntley's diagnosis was that these good people were sermon-hardened; they knew not that eloquent hearing is as necessary as eloquent preaching, or that meditation bears much the same relation to hearing that digestion does to eating.

The new Rector was an Englishman, a University man who came out to fill a mastership in a boys' school. If he had belonged to any pronounced party in the Old Country he had left all trace of partisanship behind him, and on

## Committed to his Charge

arrival here he seemed ready to do or to speak as circumstances required. As occasional preacher in the Cathedral he was noted for happy thought and language, a good voice and winning manner, more than for any special force in the presentation of doctrine. It was in the Cathedral town that he had met his Helen, just at a time when he had decided that school life did not suit him. He had almost made up his mind to plunge into city excitements, to join the High Church force and seek in work among the poor that contentment in life which his boys and school failed to afford. His passionate affection for his wife and her soothing influence on him turned the tenor of his thought and life, and it was probable no one would ever hear of former unhappinesses again. It was rarely now that he ever reverted to them, even in thought. Then, after six or seven years of married life he yearned towards parochial work; his name as a preacher was known, and when Slowford tried to find a pathway that would run straight, between the difficulties of High and Low and also out of the way of bachelors, it "called" the Reverend Thomas Huntley.

## CHAPTER V

### INNOVATIONS

THE relations between the Rector and his wife were perfect, because they were born of a mutual perfect understanding. But in a very few months they were convinced that, however well meant their individual intentions or concerted actions might be, they easily made many and serious mistakes.

They had come from a place where the ordinary intercourse of life among equals was on a totally different plane and plan from those which obtained in Slowford. Things common there would be uncommon here; actions taken as a matter of course there would here deserve the dreaded name of innovation. With the Huntleys, afternoon tea had been as honoured an institution as breakfast, a seven o'clock dinner the only dinner they knew. Slowford dined between the mid-day whistles at the Works, and never ate between meals. Then, when to suit the many and new engagements peculiar to

## Committed to his Charge

parish work the Rectory dinner became a movable feast between five-thirty and seven, the other institution was still firmly observed; for Helen was a confirmed tea-drinker, and loved her china next to her children.

Now, in novels brought from the lending library, and from travellers' tales told by Mrs. Lucy and Mrs. Lyte when they returned from occasional visits to the world, Slowford knew that such a function existed; but not even Mrs. Lucy herself ever broke fast between one and six o'clock.

The entire parish called upon Mrs. Huntley, and at all sorts of odd times. Those whom the shop-keepers called leading ladies did so, encircled by all the signs of decorum known in their world of fashion. Others chose a morning, perhaps arriving not empty-handed—a cake, or a pot of marmalade, as an offering of good-will. There were discussions as to whether such small gifts, welcome enough in the former reign, would be taken by these new people, tales of whose easy circumstances quickly developed into a romance of wealth. Humble people, like dogs and children, have tacit gauges of their own, and one clear look from Helen's gentle eyes or



## Committed to his Charge

a welcome from the Rector disarmed all fears. Old women who had not crossed the Rectory threshold since they were young, juveniles not yet "out" called; young men in the Banks hunted out their cards and wondered if they had ever had a card-case. Mr. Forby put on his high hat, a sacred tile that never left its box unless to go to a funeral (for Mr. Forby was almost a professional pall-bearer to the parish); one and all paid their respects and came away charmed with the changed and pretty rooms, the lovely wife, the interesting children, and even found words of admiration for the dogs. The innocent prattle of the babes won away the judicial glances from the last, and from Mrs. Huntley's most secular muslins and ribbons. Her means were evidently employed in beautifying herself, her home and her belongings. Whether this was orthodox or not would serve as a subject for future debate; in the meantime, while judgment was suspended, it did not do to be too cordial in the face of possible levity, and Mrs. Forby conscientiously tried to preserve an impartial front. But youth and grace and prettiness are powerful levers in public opinion, and the general verdict expressed satisfaction.

## Committed to his Charge

Mrs. Lindsay and Mrs. Forby walked away together, twins in decorum, tortoiseshell card-cases tightly grasped against those shelves kindly provided by Mother Nature, precise bows tied under the chin. Each lady rustled and glittered as she walked up the stone steps to the street.

"I take it this is to be a very different regimy from the last."

"Very," assented Mrs. Forby, with an inflection which told that the change was not necessarily for the better.

"What I can't make out is why they come here at all," said Mrs Lindsay. Her voice was one of inquiry and courted an answer.

"Why, ambition, to be sure, what else? Isn't it one of the best livings in all Canada? The loveliest and fattest farming land, the best market-town to be had? Look at that Rectory, even, before they gave it all this fixing which *I* think unnecessary. Why, it's a home and a position for any man to be proud of."

"Not that man," said Mrs. Lindsay, still unconvinced. "They are both awfully nice, though. After all, a change is pleasant."

When the parish had made its visit the names

## Committed to his Charge

were all taken down in the Rectory visiting-book, and the time came round to return the attention. Then Mrs. Huntley did a very bold thing. Wednesday had been her day in her late home, the word was on her card-plate, and she found that Wednesday still suited her. The plate was left unchanged, and she armed herself with a couple of hundred cards, newly struck off.

Had she never had a day she would have adopted one now, for constant interruptions from the parish made her time not her own for anything but receiving visits. She and the Rector began their rounds, and the bits of paste-board were scattered broadcast. He with his big stick, she with large black lace parasol shading her pretty face and pink bonnet, went everywhere that walking was possible, and then, in a hired low carriage, made a tour of the countryside. She told the farmers, in her pleasant way, that although she would be at home to every one on Wednesday afternoon, for them she would have a welcome on any day and at any hour, for she knew they must come when they could. She drank their elderberry wine and ate their curly peters, took home with her small pots

## Committed to his Charge

of cream and baskets of ferns, kissed wondering children and was keen over the mysteries of butter and poultry. In town she left her card, and made no remark. The necessity for remark did not occur to her.

On the afternoon of her visit to Mrs. Forby, Mrs. Lyte also called there, but with knitting-needles sticking out of her pocket so suggestively that Mrs. Forby supposed she would "stay tea." To ensure a rubber after the meal, the maid had been sent across for Mrs. Lindsay, bidding her "come over and bring her work." Helen Huntley sat where the slanting afternoon shadows darkened the lovelier ones under her Irish blue eyes. The pink bonnet was more becoming than ever. God forgive them; perhaps it was that latent spite which we all bear towards that which we can never be. Helen felt a lack of the warmth with which the preceding afternoon had been favoured, out among the sloping hill-sides of the Mallory and Kippan farms. She told Mrs. Lindsay that they had just come from her house, and that they had been looking at the lovely flowers in Mrs. Lyte's garden. The widows were forced to listen and tried hard to forgive the pink bonnet. Mrs. Forby, ever

## Committed to his Charge

hospitable, bustled to the sideboard and brought out her raspberry vinegar, for it was a melting September day when everything was in a quivering golden haze, with purple tinges in the distance, the leaves turned to their autumn colouring, the maples a blaze of red and golden glory.

"Have you ladies begun to think of a Harvest Home or Thanksgiving decorations yet?" asked the Rector. He was not as happy as his wife in suddenly acquired tastes for unknown liquors, and sipped his refreshment daintily.

It is hard to credit, but beyond a tale or two of English country livings, where such things had come in as part of the story and therefore appeared more or less mythical, not one of the three knew of either festival. Mrs. Forby was the first to recover herself.

"We do not have Harvest Homes in this part of Canada," the implication being that they were much too advanced for *that*. "As for Thanksgiving, I suppose we shall have it when the Bishop and Governor appoint it. We don't decorate."

"Not decorate?" said Helen, and brightening at the thought of something new, something hitherto unknown and sure to give pleasure

## Committed to his Charge

launched out into a description of such decorations and the materials employed. The three listened attentively until she came to corn and pumpkins, and then they laughed.

“You needn't laugh—a little taste and management, and anything that grows can be used; the tassels of the milkweed are beautiful. Your best breadmaker makes her handsomest loaf of bread, and with it and grapes for the Communion Table—this church is just suited for decoration, isn't it Tom?”

She spoke enthusiastically and with knowledge, but each side felt that there was lack of understanding and little sympathy between them.

“The plain glass of our windows will throw out the colours. At home there were so many beautiful memorial windows, but they spoil the harvest decorations. When a man died there, you know, his widow put up a window. Now all the windows are full, and when we left ——”

“When the Slowford men die,” said Mrs. Forby, “their widows teach music.”

The Huntleys rose to leave, and Helen put their cards on the hall table. At the door Mrs. Forby pressed them to stay, as she expected Mr. Forby back from the office any moment.

## Committed to his Charge

"No," said the Rector, "we pick up Miss Sweeting on the way home and take her to dinner. One of the many things I find I have to be thankful for in my new work is the number of capable and devoted women-workers you have—we have, here," and he smiled pleasantly.

"Well, if you waited for the men," answered Mrs. Forby, "we'd be in the same log hut the Land Company gave with the site. Their strength is in sitting still."

This promised a glimpse at history; so, with hat and stick in hand, while Helen continued her harvest descriptions to the others, he stood to listen and ask questions about the past of Slowford Parish.

They had barely taken leave when Mrs. Lindsay pounced upon the cards.

"What's this in the corner—Wednesday? Why Wednesday more than Tuesday, I wonder. To-day's neither."

"Wednesday?"

"Wednesday?" and each held the card in turn, Mrs. Lyte last.

"It means she will be at home on that day."

"It would have been friendlier if she'd said something about it," sniffed Mrs. Forby.

## Committed to his Charge

"Oh, but it means any Wednesday."

"No!" said Mrs. Lindsay dogmatically; "she means us to come next Wednesday. Well, I never! What next, I wonder! A bonnet like that, and setting us new fashions all in one afternoon!"

"And her Harvest Thanksgiving!" said Mrs. Forby. "This church has been thankful for forty odd years without decorating with beets and turnips. Such balderdash! But she was earnest, poor little thing, and had some good, plain, practical ideas in spite of that bonnet. She is young and pretty, and they say has money. She'll have trouble. But by-and-bye she'll settle down, depend on it."

Mrs. Forby spoké hopefully, and as if she would not be above a personal contribution to the trouble.

"I think she is a sweet little soul," said Mrs. Lyte; "such eyes and pretty hair, like a child's. As for Wednesday," and she touched the card, "I shall go, in case that's her intention, but I am pretty sure her idea is only to have a 'day' as they call it."

"Fads and nonsense!" cried Mrs. Forby  
"Can't she take her plain seam and be at home



## Committed to his Charge

any day like the rest of us! She isn't going to be tramping about the town every other afternoon in the week, I suppose? I have no room for airs. You two will have to excuse me a bit while I go see to tea. This new maid that came to-day seems all at sea."

"She'll soon wish she was," was in Mrs. Lindsay's eye as she looked at Mrs. Lyte for sympathy.

"Do you like honey?" continued the hostess, turning to Mrs. Lyte with a quickness which made that lady recall her wandering glance; "the bees swarmed last week."

They sat down to a substantial meal called tea, with whets to appetite in the shape of snowy cloth and a bowl of Jacqueminot roses in the centre of the table. Mrs. Forby sat before a huge silver tray with lace-pattern edge, set with white Chelsea cups and saucers. With one blow of his carver Mr. Forby demolished the anatomy of the large cold roast chicken, and asked the two ladies their choice in the wreck before him.

"The upper part of the leg and a trifle of dressing—*and* the oyster." Mrs. Lindsay was reputed to know everything that was good.

Mrs. Forby's thoughts were still with the church.

## Committed to his Charge

"I wonder if they have a string of turkeys and geese for the Harvest Home—hanging in front of the organ, say—or over the pulpit, for choice. Pumpkins! It seems like sacrilege, to my mind."

"I'd as lieve have a good pumpkin as a saint," put in Mrs. Lindsay. "I fancy the Rector will soon find out that Saints-Day services won't go down here. Dulcie Sweeting was the congregation at the last one, St.—St.—What's-his-name——"

"St. Matthew," supplied Mrs. Lyte, her mouth full of white meat and thin home-made bread-and-butter. She took a mouthful of the rich creamy tea in the Chelsea cup beside her, in preparation for carrying on the conversation. "And what did he do—send her home? If there was a service in the middle of the night, Miss Sweeting would be there."

"Send her home—not a bit of him. Mad as a hatter, and went through the whole thing from exhortation to blessing. Said, 'Dearly Beloved,' and left out 'brethren' of course."

"That was quite personal, wasn't it?" said Mrs. Forby. "More tea? Two lumps? He was a bold man to commit himself that far to Dulcie; she would have sued the curate for

## Committed to his Charge

breach of promise on less evidence than that—but he was a very wary young man though he did manage to make her do more than half his work for him. He was not protected like Mr. Huntley; the Rector can be bold where the curate had to be full of guile. Well then, what happened next—and who told you, if she was the only one there?”

“Peter did.” Peter the sexton was Mrs. Lindsay’s great friend and ally. “Well, of course, then came the psalms, good long ones, and he up and read every one of them. She fussed with her prayer-book and went into better light.”

“It’s my opinion she ought to take to glasses—and I told her so.”

“Of course she should; she’s fifty if she’s a day, and has failed fearfully the last year.” This was mere friendly licence; Miss Sweeting was not much over forty. “He put her through every word of them, every response, too; the only thing he let her off was the sermon. When it came to that he flounced back to the vestry in a huff.”

“They have Saints-Day services in some places,” said Mrs. Lyte, “and I suppose he is accustomed to it. I must say I thought his sermon on the

## Committed to his Charge

subject, some Sundays ago, was very reasonable. I would have gone myself that day, but there was a lacrosse match and something to see to for the boys."

"Well," said Mrs. Lindsay, laying down her knife and fork beside the bare bone of the upper part of the leg, "he may preach *for ever*, but he'll *never* make *me* think any more of them saints," and she finished the last drop in the Chelsea teacup to emphasize the pledge.

Mrs. Forby rang the silver bell at her side as she said, "Oh, come now, there were good people among the saints even if they didn't wash much."

Mrs. Lyte laughed. "You are hardly more enthusiastic than Mrs. Lindsay."

"Well, I never had much use for them—a fussy lot that hadn't patience to *bidē* their time. To my mind there isn't much merit in being broiled unless you've got to be. Nine out of ten of them were always hunting for trouble; when they found it they got into a calendar or a red and blue window, and wanted to have services."

"There is no doubt about it," said Mrs. Lyte, "that whether they ever arrive at saintship or not, clergymen begin as martyrs. Those students suffer terribly over their first sermons."

## Committed to his Charge

"So do their hearers," put in Mr. Forby unexpectedly. "That is one of the tricks of Providence to even up things and keep the two sides straight."

"I never heard tricks associated with Providence before," said his wife.

"Didn't you, Maria? Well, I have known but one woman who could see two sides of a case, and she wouldn't admit it when it came to the point."

"It is hard to see a good side when both are bad," came from the tea-tray tartly; "your clever women——"

"I didn't say she was clever—only that she had a trifle more common sense than ordinary."

"But the poor things must make a beginning," said Mrs. Lindsay, returning to the students; "they must begin somewhere."

"I suppose so. So must dentists. But they shan't begin on me."

Again Mrs. Forby rang her bell.

"That girl must be deaf. I had a maid last month who thought we were taking too long at dinner and she came in the middle of it with 'Say—don't forget you've got a pie!' This one is as rough as heather, but I *told* her to come in

## Committed to his Charge

when I rang." Mrs Forby emphasised the word "told" as if to hear was not always to obey.

"What do you think about these Saints-Day services, Mr. Forby?" asked Mrs. Lyte; "a warden ought to have an opinion about saints."

"They could have been made pot-pie of for all I care," said the warden; "they never hurt me. Mrs. Forby here may go as often as she likes; but for me, twice on Sunday was good enough for my father, and it's good enough for me. I don't hold much with week-day religion."

"Well, I do," asserted Mrs. Lindsay, half frightened at the pass to which she had brought the saints and shocked at a warden's rejection of religion for week-day use. After all, little as she thought of them, pot-pie was *infra dig.* for saints. "I do. And what's more, Sunday religion doesn't do much good if it doesn't go through the whole week, washing-day and all, clear to Saturday night. Of course, we all have our notions; but religion that doesn't make us sweeter tempered doesn't do much for the soul. That's my opinion."

The assertion seemed to strike both Mr. and Mrs. Forby as forcible, but they exchanged the application. The wife looked up and nodded at

## Committed to his Charge

her husband, as if to advise him to take Mrs. Lindsay's wisdom to heart.

"Right you are," said he, with a return nod at the tea-tray.

This time Mrs. Forby rang with such force that her pretty bell was threatened with dismemberment.

"These girls are enough to drive one mad."

Just then something rushed past the first wide-open window, pausing at the second. The new maid was neat, rough but clean, a capable-looking creature, with hair tightly put back from her face, a white apron covering most of her person, and all the outward appearance of a respectable servant. She thrust her head into the room and surveyed the party, elbows resting on the sill.

"It's no use your ringing like that. The more you ring the more I won't come!" Having made the announcement, she withdrew.

"Well, I'm blest!" and Mr. Forby burst into a hearty laugh. Then he meekly took his own plate to the sideboard and returned for those of the ladies.

Mrs. Forby was speechless for a moment—but only for a moment.

"Mrs. Huntley did right when she brought one

## Committed to his Charge

with her. That's scalded cream, Mrs. Lyte ; here's honey and bottled peaches, Mrs. Lindsay —a cookie? That savage makes them uncommonly well. Now I come to think of it she looked at me rather queerly when I told her about the bell. You may all laugh, but it's a pretty pass to come to."

They gave Mr. Forby an account of the afternoon's visit, the new light on thanksgiving and harvesting, the pink bonnet, the Wednesday card and many small items.

"I suppose it's all right," said Mrs. Forby ; "she has money, so they have a right to do as they please with it, but it seems kind of airy to me. I never came across a parson and his wife with means before."

"Seems kind of to interfere with your rights, doesn't it, Maria?" said her husband slyly. "Well, as regards their ideas, I for one won't interfere with them, but they had better keep the right side of Low. He is completely under the thumb of the Orange crowd, and they see enemies in every bush. For my part I don't see any objection in having things as good-looking and orderly in church as out of it."

"That's the first time in my life that I ever



## Committed to his Charge

heard you allow any beauty in orderliness," said Mrs. Forby, glad of a chance to retaliate.

Mrs. Lindsay put in a word to ward off retort.

"It is a good thing to see a wide-awake, clever man in the church. Most of these parsons are old pokes. Jim was telling me that Mr. Granger at the school the other day, in discussing the shapes of different head-pieces, spoke very handsomely of the Rector's. Said he had a wonderful anterior globe."

"Did he, indeed?" Mr. Forby was dreamily letting the conversation go by him, but was determined to be interested in his capacity of chairman of the School Board. Then he woke up, and laughed. "Did he, indeed, Mrs. Lindsay—wonderful man!"

Later in the evening the lady of the kitchen described to her young man how she had taught a lesson to the people in the dining-room—"Sittin' there as if they hadn't a leg among them to take one plate to the sideboard and bring another back! Such airs—ringin' a bell, indeed! I'll teach 'em. And such a day's work as I've done—I fairly ache. But I can't hold a candle to the missus herself. She works like a catamount."

## CHAPTER VI

### MISS SWEETING DINES

THE evening meal at the Rectory passed off much more quietly.

The room in which it was eaten was kept strictly for dining-room purposes, and therefore was not as pretty as the other. Mrs. Forby's had in it a sofa and easy chairs, and opened upon a small conservatory which was full of blooms, summer and winter. But Mrs. Forby's drawing-room was quite a different affair; there was an air and odour of sanctity there, quite inconsistent with comfort. Everything in it was good, but nothing was easy or homelike; not a thread was the worse for wear. In Helen Huntley's room the things originally had been equally good, but of a different atmosphere, and some of them were much the worse for wear. There were easy chairs, used many times by a heavy figure; vases to hold flowers, and large, strange things for ferns; soft cushions everywhere, and many other articles hitherto unknown in Slowford.

## Committed to his Charge

In the dining-room the Rector, Helen, and Miss Sweeting, sat at a small round table that looked bare compared with Mrs. Forby's profusion of viands; but it held more decoration, if less evidence of the wants of the inner man. An elderly and terribly respectable serving-woman, in cap and apron, waited. This was old Ann, the servant who followed the Huntley fortunes. She was a relic from Helen's childhood, bound to die in the service of the child of her devotion.

The Rector looked tired; but it was healthy fatigue, with the sense of accomplished work behind it.

"Do you know," he said to Miss Sweeting, "when I came in from my morning rounds Mrs. Huntley asked me what was wrong—she said I looked vexed. Can you think what vexed me?"

Miss Sweeting's small face was full of sympathetic inquiry.

"That I could find no poor people!"

"But I told him," said Helen hopefully, "that winter would bring them out."

"That would be much the best time for them to stay in. No; but what I notice here so much is the absence of all want; there is a kind

## Committed to his Charge

of smug, self-conscious prosperity, if you'll excuse the expression."

"We have always thought ourselves rather poor as a congregation," said Miss Sweeting meekly. "The Presbyterians, as a body, are much richer, and give much more."

"Possibly—the latter," answered the Rector drily, "although, in the matter of home giving, when one counts the age of the place and the difficulties about its beginning, we have done a good deal. All the same, I notice in the Mission Book we come lowest in the list—far behind places of less size and importance."

Miss Sweeting sighed and thought it might be so. Her province at home was to tell unpalatable truths and make unwelcome discoveries, but in the house of her entertainers she was unvaryingly acquiescent. Her motto might have been "*Les absents ont toujours tort*," for her amiability towards those present always conveyed a reflection on some one not at hand to defend himself.

"I think the poor Rector meant well. He certainly visited well—he spent many a whole afternoon with us. But the Guild has always taken the Home work in hand, and the Mis-

## Committed to his Charge

sionary branch has been the weakest part of it."

"Well, you know," said the present incumbent, with a feeling of gallant defence towards his dead predecessor, "they say a house-going parson makes a Church-going people, and once he got them there he should have bled them better. And I am sure it is true regarding the visiting," he hastened to add, as he saw signs of more hints of former shortcomings, "for my only experience of parish work before I came here, a very short, country one, proved it so. The power of my legs in taking me over miles of muddy roads, my memory for the one who had had measles and the one who had not, an aptitude in knowing Mary from Susan and John from Jim, won me more golden opinions than any learning I had gained from books or my solicitude in saving souls. I was expected, too, to eat something wherever I went—sometimes eight places a day—and that was where I particularly shone. A little more of that delicious pudding, Helen dear, if you please."

To Miss Sweeting's ear this was very light talk, an experience as strange as the dinner-table and the dinner. Her ideas of the latter

## Committed to his Charge

had been confined to a joint, two vegetables and a pudding; now, golden-brown balls in silver side-dishes appeared to be potatoes, and a sweet separated itself into jelly and sponge in a way that was most embarrassing. Claret, and a crystal tub of powdered ice, demanded an acquired taste. But the Rector's smile was very winning, and the look on his face as he turned it towards his wife redeemed it from plainness. Miss Sweeting swivelled her cannon and threw her projectile in another direction.

"Some people objected to Mr. Short's sermons because he was a scientific man and preached science more than the Gospel."

"Well, science is our latest gospel." She looked so really grieved that he paused in his attack on his second helping. "Surely no thorough believer in Christianity can maintain that the study of God's word in nature can tend to disbelief or generate infidelity? Properly followed, it should strengthen—not weaken. The trouble with the materialist is that his mind dwells upon matter and concentrates thought until his theory becomes limited by it. By degrees the moral and the spiritual fall back until they are forgotten or denied. But that is

## Committed to his Charge

the abuse, not the use. I wish I had known your Rector. From all I hear, he was a very good man."

With Miss Sweeting the Incumbent-in-Office was always the best.

"Yes, he was a practically good man," she allowed, as if that was the lowest form of worth, "very moderate in his views, and gave good sermons—as a general thing. Mrs. Forby used to say his life was his best sermon."

"A long sermon," said the Rector in a sad voice, eating his pudding abstractedly. "But there are no short cuts to spiritual achievement. As to his sermons, if he had given you the older gospel instead of that one you object to, Miss Sweeting, he might have pleased you still less. Practical exposition of the Gospel is very trying when it bears hard on personal faults. I have winced many a time under my own words when I seemed to be pelting other people. More claret?"

"No, thank you. I am fond of doctrinal sermons myself."

The Rector looked incredulous.

"But you are not like the others, then," said Helen to her guest, hoping to find some

## Committed to his Charge

sympathy in her own leanings towards more ritual. Her husband smiled at her and shook his head as if to say she would find no comfort here.

Miss Sweeting paused before committing herself. She had already found out what she termed Helen's "weakness," and did not wish to be too ready to become a partisan. On the other hand, to be asked to prove herself different from the common herd was too tempting an opening to be refused. The Rector came to her deliverance.

"There is doctrine and doctrine," he said smiling at the combat of two forces within her and at the contrast of the two faces before him, one all light and life and youth, the other wizened, suspicious and wary—"and it might happen that the man who gave you the doctrinal sermon might *not* happen to suit you both. After all's said and done, if religion is to be of practical value it must come into direct contact with the needs of daily life," a remark which echoed one made not long before at Mrs. Forby's tea-table.

"Oh, Tom! How can you! As if it hurts daily life to say one's prayers properly, and hear



## Committed to his Charge

a man preach in a cassock instead of out of one! I believe you sometimes talk for the sake of taking the opposite side."

"Then my arguments must cut their own throats?"

"That doesn't matter, so long as it is an argument."

The Rector laughed, and searched in his mind for something that would bring her out again; she was lovelier than ever when in a glow.

"Miss Sweeting is right enough." Miss Sweeting smiled. "In these times worship is apt to displace instruction somewhat. If you are thinking so much of what a man may happen to be in or out of—except, of course, his mind—he ought always to be *in* that"—Helen threw a bit of geranium stem at him—"you are not so much taken up with the matter of what he may be saying." He grew grave again. "I have a deep, deep love for decent order; but observance must be made subservient to teaching—and several other things. I have an honest sympathy with any side which may be in earnest. Of course, if we teach the doctrine, one would think that hearers would require that that which they learned should be exhibited in the services."

## Committed to his Charge

Miss Sweeting did not like "honest sympathy" with any side but one, and she liked the concluding portion of his sentence still less.

"In that way you would end in pleasing no one. If honest sympathy were so evenly balanced you would be neither one thing nor the other, and would be left high and dry by everybody," said Helen.

"A cool, reasoning, critical temperament does not generally attract others," he answered, "nor easily adapt itself to environment. Loneliness is the usual penalty of uncompromising independence."

"Well, I should have uncompromising independence enough to leave out that odious little prayer at the beginning of the sermon. I am sure, Tom, you never did it before—at least, not since I knew you."

"My love, my love, you must not call any little prayer odious! Come to the drawing-room, Miss Sweeting—she is not often as bad as this. There is one thing, though, that I do take exception to, and that is the congregation following in the General Thanksgiving."

"We have always done it so," said Miss Sweeting, as if that were the incontrovertible

## Committed to his Charge

argument why it should be continued. The Rector shrugged his shoulders.

"Is that the only thing, Tom?" asked Helen mischievously. "What about Granny Quick and—oh, a number of things!" she finished suddenly, as she remembered that Miss Sweeting's solos were of the chief offences.

In the drawing-room a fresh surprise awaited the guest. A wicker table stood there, one which had drawn forth much comment and which Mrs. Lindsay said "completely non-pulsed her, with all those little shelves and queer rims." Now it held a pretty tea equipment, and old Ann presently appeared with a bright kettle, which was fitted in its stand above burning spirit, and a Japanese teapot, through the like of which Slowford tea had never allowed itself to be poured; prettier, as Miss Sweeting at once perceived, than the best electro-plate. Electro, she was convinced, always gave a taste to the tea. So now her soul was flooded with the unfulfilled longings which the sight of a new household god, be it teapot, baby or kitchen utensil, always has the power to raise into riot in a woman built on the truly feminine, old-fashioned principle, who is without house and belongings

## Committed to his Charge

of her own. Nor had she seen such tiny sugar-tongs, and indeed was accustomed to granulated sugar rather than lump.

The Rector stood at the window and tried to pierce the twilight, in speculation as to tomorrow's weather.

"Good for the farmers," he said, turning to the contrasting brightness of the room and looking at that spot of, to him, brightest brightness where Helen sat at her tea-table, her brows puckered over two lumps or one, and the lace from her sleeve falling back to show the lovely wrist beneath it.

"Spirit of warmth and light and love,  
My wife,"

thought he ; but his next words were addressed to the visitor.

"I was trying to talk up a Harvest Home, or decorations, something of that kind, this afternoon ; but you do not seem to have ever gone in much for all that. Apart from the propriety of the custom, I think it would be useful in bringing the country and townspeople together, promote good fellowship, and that sort of thing, you know."

Miss Sweeting looked dubious for a moment, then brightened.

## Committed to his Charge

"I think it would be lovely. We must."

"It might turn out like the service on St. Matthews' Day," laughed Helen. "Nothing but baby could have kept me away that day. You need not be afraid to support him next time—I'll be sure to go. The Rector is beginning to look upon you as a prop, you know."

Miss Sweeting's face beamed as much as nature would permit and the Harvest decorations were assured from that moment.

"There is no danger of not having a large enough congregation," she said. "Curiosity sometimes brings them when nothing else will. It is the country people who make a fuss about what would pass with others."

"We must try to keep the right side of them, for it is from them most of the decorations will come."

Again did the Huntleys go over their scheme for decoration, design and materials, and discussed what would suit this particular Church best.

"A sweet little Early English place like that is just the very best one we could have," cried Helen, and Miss Sweeting grew still more enthusiastic, for she dearly loved that building

## Committed to his Charge

Love had a narrow dwelling-place in that maiden bosom, for, like many other powers, love is shaped as well as shaping. A cramped life, a misfit in her corner of the world, had made this woman many things which perhaps Nature had not planned her to be.

By the time they parted for the night, lists had been made of necessary materials, and the names of those best suited for work selected from the Guild membership for a Decoration Committee. The Rector was to set out the next day to endeavour in one visit to predispose the country to the idea and to solicit grain and other produce needed for it. Helen would accompany him, for he knew, if she did not, how much aid the pink bonnet and her sweet manner might lend.

When Huntley returned from leaving Miss Sweeting at the Lucys', Helen was still in the drawing-room.

"I think I do like Miss Sweeting after all," she said: "I will never call her a gossip again. Her sympathy is like a great rock in a weary land. I believe we shall have the Harvest Home after all. I do believe I'll ask her to come over next Wednesday afternoon, and if anyone calls

## Committed to his Charge

we can talk decorations and thankfulness. Not that anyone will come—thank goodness, they are all paid up and returned, and it will be some time before they'll be here again."

"You don't speak as if enamoured of your new friends," said her husband, with hand under her chin, so that the beautiful eyes might be made to look into his own.

"Are *you*?" she inquired very directly.

He laughed.

"I don't know what it may be when the novelty wears off; in the meantime they are—some of them—very amusing, if a trifle provoking. I am not afraid, though; there must be some way of breaking down ignorance and prejudice, surely. If all the tales I hear be true of these Orange farmer fellows, we have stumbled into a bit of the dark ages that has missed civilisation. Is that baby? She has been wonderfully good. Well, goodnight for the present—I must off to my books, and get wisdom for these critical sermon-tasters."

## CHAPTER VII

### THE COUNTRYSIDE

IT took many afternoons to canvass the whole country-side, afternoons of the glorious September days full of strange calm tempered by the soft, deep haze peculiar to the month. A languorous glow overspread the face of the land, bathing the tidy fields and stacked grain, the long, level lines of white high-road, and the bronze, purple and many-tinted woods, in an atmosphere of quiver, out of which stood flocks of sheep and soft-toned Jersey cows.

It is hard to say why it should be so ; but the one thing sure to make a lasting impression on the pioneer, the foreign writer or tourist, or the visitor in Canada, was and is the winter season in its Canadian aspect. The most loyal native, or the one most gifted of the Muses has only lately begun to sing to Spring. Why we should not have as many pictures of golden harvest, of perfumed fruit fields, or of that



## Committed to his Charge

gorgeous season as wholly Canadian as the fiercest or most beautiful winter, when we

See the autumn hand  
Of God upon the maples,

is beyond the comprehension of those who love Canada as she is.

The Rector and his wife drove under the spreading apple boughs, where the cattle munched their fill of grass and stole the juicy leavings of the apple harvest. The lane was planted on one side with a double row of firs, now reaching maturity, ready to cast a grateful shade in summer or afford protection from the north wind in winter. Along the length of that lane was an epitome of a pioneer's career. First came a log hut, about sixteen feet square, with its one window long ago boarded up, and now serving as a retreat for whatever animals might be grazing near. That was the original dwelling of this now rich homestead, its logs chinked with mud, and roofed with basswood troughs set at an angle to carry off heavy rains. On the snowy morning following his first night's lodging, Farmer Mallory had found at his door four deer, frightened to shelter, perhaps, by greater dangers within the bush, and Mrs. Mallory's first

## Committed to his Charge

marketing had been purchased from Indians who, camped farther on, were glad to divide their venison, bear's meat and maple sugar for the questionable currency of tobacco and firewater.

Then a few feet away, a second abode grew up, still of logs but boasting more roof, two rooms downstairs with glazed windows, a loft above for the men and boys, ceilings and plastered walls. The deer came less often, and the Indians had either gone away or had died out; the orchard bloomed and bore fruit, and the corduroy gave place to a gravel road.

One crown in pocket when they landed; two hundred acres of uncleared land in the heart of an unexplored forest, much of it swamp; hard work; a winter or two on diet that would now kill their children; a succession of toiling years for slow-coming plenty; big barn-raising, and increasing live-stock; a stone house, firm of foundation, commodious, and comfortably furnished, to succeed the second log one, and the Canadian family history of the Mallorys is told. Their children's education began at the Township School, with a winter or two in Slowford to "finish" them. As a result one son went farther still, and after passing through the

## Committed to his Charge

High School completed his attainments at the nearest Agricultural College; and a daughter, determined to escape the lonely drudgery of farm life, managed to fit herself as a teacher in a public school. It was not long before a reed organ stood in the place of honour in the best room—which, under the unskilled fingers employed upon it, gave forth extraordinary noises. It was always called “the instrument,” and to the old farmer’s eyes represented music in a concrete form. Later, a piano was added, but it did not, as in many households, supersede the other. To old Mallory, the drone of “the instrument” was the chief part of the music; and let who would enjoy the piano, he clove to “the instrument.” Then a younger son became a mechanic, turning his back on the work of his father; but the eldest, not caring to quarrel with his bread and butter, consented to succeed to the hard-earned competence of his parents.

The Huntleys drove leisurely up the lane, past the pump yard with its noisy colony of geese and ducks; past the barking collie, whose savage greeting turned to fawnings and sharp yelps of welcome; past the huge frame barns on their stone arches, with reaches of shady

## Committed to his Charge

interior where the landscape was framed by further openings; past labourers, who, glad to see a strange face, nodded an answering good-day; and still on, to where Mrs. Mallory was to be found on most sunny afternoons. To-day a brilliant red breakfast-shawl was about her shoulders, more in compliment to the month than from necessity. A pan of apples rested between her knees, and as the quarters lost their skins and cores they found place in large pie dishes, in preparation against the coming bee. Her welcome took the form of apology for not having been at church on the previous Sunday, and for having failed to send a promised bag of apples. The doubt that such presents might now be undesired had as yet not entered her rustic mind. Attention was chiefly drawn to her keen face by the stiff curls which garnished it on either side. We all have our ambitions, and our signs whereby we show that struggle is past and rest is here. Those stiff curls had appeared with Mrs. Mallory's sense of warfare done, and were a continual reminder to herself that she was a woman of leisure. Her countenance indicated mother wit in every one of its many lines. She had had

## Committed to his Charge

little but that wit on which to lean. Neither she nor her husband could write or read ; but in him the faculty of memory was so developed that, without records of any kind, he knew the dates on every paper in his possession, when a note fell due which one to select from the pile to present to a particular person, and the amount he was to receive. He could pick out his mortgages and tell to a cent the amount of interest due and the date of payment ; and although he could not count, it was impossible to cheat or deceive him. He would look for his papers without the aid of light, for he "knew 'em by the veelin' of 'em."

"It wasn't no use," Mrs. Mallory continued to explain, "try as I might ; for granpa died the forepart of the week, and we threshed the second. Come in, do. Here, Johnnie—tie up the Rector's horse. And Mary, bring in a jug of buttermilk and some cookies. I got the apples ready, if you don't mind takin' 'em back with you. I can give you a jar o' clotted cream, too. We don't get much cream, these times, with the factories! but there's one pot, surely. Yes, granpa died, poor old soul, and him eighty-eight come next New Year. Took sudden at

## Committed to his Charge

the last. Yes—yes! You're wonderin' the funeral wasn't to town, but he wanted to be buried nigh his ole woman in the Township buryin' ground by young Jim's farm, and bein' like you were a stranger and he'd know'd the Methodis' parson quite a bit and his wife too we humoured him and let him. Her'n' him come from the same town in the ole country and it seemed friendlier like and more comfortable but meanin' no offence."

It was difficult to divine who had died and who had been buried. Mrs. Mallory possessed no commas and only a few full stops. The daughter presently appeared with the milk and cookies. She was an artificial-looking young person, wearing high-heeled shoes and a bang; her hands, only, indicated her mode of life. "Gems for the Family Circle" stood open on the music rest of the piano, at "Old Hundred with brilliant variations." It was hard to reconcile those hands with brilliancy of execution. One of the large, work-worn fingers was tied up with a plentiful wrapping of cotton, and the Rector made sympathetic inquiry.

"Yes, I been practisin', but I hurted my hand this mornin'. Caff bet me."

## Committed to his Charge

There were no visible traces of mourning for the grandfather. The first Sunday at church would bring that out, on father and mother ; but Miss Mallory had no time to mourn for a grandparent who had been "took sudden," when her autumn finery was all ready to wear and only needed cooler weather to make it permissible.

The subject of harvest decorations was brought forward, and grain, fruit and vegetables were promised readily, so readily that the Rector remembered Miss Sweeting's opinion of the country people, and pronounced her fault-finding and imaginative.

Then came hurried farewells, for the sun was on the wane and the Kippan farm was yet to be visited. The cream and apples were stowed away, the collie and the fowls set up their chorus again, and Huntley, once clear of the tortuous lane, flicked his horse to make better time.

"Look," said he, as they reached the brow of the hill. He pointed with his whip to the scene below them, where the fields gently undulated to the small stream, across which a trimmed wood, cleared of underbush, gave peeps of sunlight between the boles. "It is like a bit of English scenery."

## Committed to his Charge

He sighed, and Helen looked quickly from the pastoral picture to his face.

"As I said last night, what plenty, what success! Hard work, but wonderful success. A lumpish lot of people, though."

She smiled. "I have often heard you say you missed the queer people, and the soap and water more than anything else when you first came out. There seems to be dearth of neither in this place. Fancy associating anything but spotlessness with Mrs. Forby! And could you wish for anything queerer than Miss Sweeting, or Mrs. Lindsay, or, indeed, any of them? If we had gone to a city parish how different would have been the work!"

"If we had the true missionary spirit, that is where we should be," he answered, smiling; "there is more sin in a city. But nowadays they say sin is only energy gone wrong."

Helen crossed her hands in her lap.

"Do let us be thankful Mrs. Forby's head was turned right at the start."

The Rector laughed. "There are certainly, according to that belief, great sinning possibilities in Mrs. Forby."

"The force does not seem to remain equal in



## Committed to his Charge

the two positions," she said, after a moment's thought. "I mean that although she is a very actively good woman, she is not as much of an angel as she might have been a sinner."

"Metaphysics! Let us be thankful she is as good as she is, and friendly to us. Consider what the parish, the county indeed, would be, if all her energy turned the other way! The place seems a paradise, but I think her fault is that she *is* too actively good. From small things I have heard, Forby is not looked upon as a model, like, well, say Low, though I must confess I, for one, like him much better. I really think he is glad to get out of the house."

He spoke as of a thing hard to believe. He had had little experience in other homes, and for himself, when he closed his own hall-door behind him, he shut out care and the world.

"You mean her continual cleaning and restlessness? Surely you would not have anyone dirty?"

"Not exactly dirty, but comfortable. Stress is continually laid on the sins of omission in slatternly women, but we never hear of the men who have been housecleaned into despair. Many an absentee likens himself to Noah's

## Committed to his Charge

dove, and seeks a snug corner in some hostelry because of a plethora of soap and water at home."

Helen laughed.

"You may laugh," he continued, "but I have been studying these people, and I find the country man is a slothful-minded creature, whose living now comes easily to him and to whom comfort is the greatest blessing in life. He doesn't want much trouble about anything."

"In this case it is not only the husband who is dissatisfied. When I engaged Mary she gave me Mrs. Forby as reference, when I asked for one. She seemed quite surprised that I did ask. I told Mrs. Forby her name, but she did not remember her. But, I said, she says she lived with you. And then she went on in her downright fiery way, 'Oh, any girl in the country might say that—I should be sorry to burden my mind with a record of all their names and incapacities.' After a bit she remembered and spoke very highly of her. I often wish Mary would volunteer the story of why she did not stay. I am quite curious."

"That is just like her, isn't it?" said the Rector. "She is so deliciously honest. I am

## Committed to his Charge

sure she is as good a mother as she is a good most things—to use a localism—but I can never picture her when she was a *young* mother. Imagine a small bundle lying beside her, and Mrs. Forby reduced to a diet of gruel and arrowroot! It seems a libellous thought.”

The Rector was right in his diagnosis. Mrs. Forby's troubles were not of a bitter kind, but, such as they were, were of her own making. The country man is often a sloven. All his devotions are apt to be perfunctory, and at any rate he is sometimes quite willing that all sacrifices at the shrine of the goddess of cleanliness shall be vicarious. Thrice happy the priestess who so contrives that causes shall be hidden and only effects seen!

Another fir-planted, one-sided avenue, more barns and remnants of log structures; another stone house, and the Huntleys were at the Kippan homestead.

Farmer Kippan was a North-of-Ireland Orangeman, with a shock of dark red hair which remained bushy and curly in spite of his many years. The glance under his shaggy brows was always sideways; loss of teeth could not take away the firm look of mouth and chin in the

## Committed to his Charge

clever but sinister face. Between his knees he held a big thorn stick, knobbed at the end, and with it he emphasized his speech; the floor, all about the chair in which he usually sat, was marked with the round impressions. He, like the Mallorys, promised stuff towards the decorations, and his wife brought in her offering of new-laid eggs for the Rectory children.

Kippan talked politics much more than religion; in fact, politics was his religion. It was hard to be more of a Tory than the Rector was or wished to be, but talk Toryism as he might, to humour his listener, he could not fulfil Kippan's requirements. Opinion was particularly hard upon one then high in Government who had been Protestant and had "turned."

"Naw, don't tell me," said the old man in his mixed Canadian and hard northern tongue, his stick playing a lively tattoo. "I'll stay at home and never vote, and so'll me byes, afore we poll a vote for a renegade like him. A traitor, sir. I'd not mind a rale Frenchman, be he half frog, who wuz born that way and cuddn't help it; he'd never knowed better. But born English-speakin, and turned a Papist!" Here he swore

## Committed to his Charge

some good Protestant oaths. "They tell me, sir, there's talk of High Church doin's now—well, I'm goin' to warn ye. Never, while I've the breath of life in me, is such goin' to come to Slowford. Come rain, come shine, I go to the Easter Vestry, and once for all, I won't have to do with none such. They'll tell you, any one will, I've carried the Vestry there forty odd years, and the old Rector never crossed me. They knew better. Go see my buryin' plot, and you'll find out. And I'm good for twenty years more, please God Almighty. Dead or alive, Rome has no parts in me. Yes, yes, you can have the wheat and the green stuff. Child's play, it seems to me, but no harm. Here wife, bring your grog—the Rector an' me 'll take a horn, and you take pretty Mrs. Rector in with you."

Pretty Mrs. Rector looked half-frightened and was glad to escape from the neighbourhood of this dreadful old autocrat. She gladly followed the wife to a bare, dark room, where light and heat were seldom allowed near the decorations loved, and mostly made, by the mistress. There were cornices made of fir cones, from which stiff lace curtains, blued past all

## Committed to his Charge

whiteness, depended in angular folds; a clock on the mantelpiece that was never wound and must have forgotten how to tick; a piano, whose black, polished surface was in keeping with its funereal surroundings; wonderful baskets and ornaments, made of cut paper and frayed cotton; mats, where rags were tortured into ghostly likenesses of dogs and cats, that suggested, by their distorted anatomies, the need of a Humane Society; some chromos of wonderful waterfalls and rocks, and some of still more wonderful ladies and gentlemen; deep-framed panels holding bouquets of wool work and hair wreaths; a bunch of home-made wax flowers in an oval glass case, and, chief treasures of all, three frames of unusual size and depth decorating three of the four walls of the room, each containing a silver coffin-plate and a long tress of hair. The thrifty Kippan considered silver coffin plates much too good stuff to bury. The identities of the three wives were preserved in the three inscriptions and in the different colours of the three locks of hair—red, flaxen, and brown. It was to be supposed that the full complement of colour would in time be added from the black head of the present

## Committed to his Charge

Mistress Kippan, on the fourth wall. Money to spend she never had, for Kippan was peculiar in his views of the butter and eggs perquisites, and her joys were the decorations she could manage to convert out of odds and ends. This fourth Mrs. Kippan was still young, strong, and possessed of a power of silence which stood her in good stead for daily life with such a husband and the remnants of three families. Her own brood resembled their mother, pursuing a quiet, determined way of their own amid the mixed family relations. There is a silent strength which offers no resistance to argument, but, like a willow in the pauses of the wind, returns to its first position.

Mrs. Kippan brought in a bright red tray and put it on the table beside her husband. On it stood a decanter—full to the stopper—a brass kettle of boiling water, two large tumblers, another with sugar in it, and a plate of cake. The Rector left his smoking brew, and stood before the bookcase.

“I see you have lots of books, Kippan. I suppose you are fond of reading, now you can afford to give up your more active life. Settled down into a regular old bookworm, I’ve no doubt.”

## Committed to his Charge

"I allus was fond of it," answered the old man, with a thud of the stick that made the glasses on the tray jingle again, "allus. I've had weak eyes all my life long 'cause I used to steal downstairs arter the folks were abed, when I was a little lad, and I'd lay in front o' the fire and spell it out as long as the back-log gave enough light. Many's a book I've gone through that way, an' I had to hide 'em in the hayloft in the daytime, so the wimmin wouldn't find 'em—fussin' round the men's garret. I often wonder how I learnt it all. I had one old spellin' book, with readin' lessons at the back, an' when I'd no chores to do at dinner-time—and that was mighty seldom—I'd lie in a snake-fence corner and spell 'em out. There was one fellow, good-natured-like, who helped me a bit sometimes."

"They say that what we earn hardly we enjoy most," said the Rector, as he looked, not without admiration, at the hard-featured old man.

"I guess I ought to have jolly times, then," and the stick rattled up and down while the wrinkled face fell into folds proper to laughter. "Heh-heh! I must be a jolly old chap! 'Twas nothin' but earnin' hardly in my time, I can tell ye."



## Committed to his Charge

Beside the Family Bible, all evidently in recent use, lay a "Pilgrim's Progress," a set of Church Homilies, and a pamphlet bearing the suggestive title of "Ruin, Rome and Ritualism."

The Rector got further light on the allusion to the burying plot, but the story is worth telling here.

When the schoolhouse was to be built it was considered advisable to remove to the new cemetery as many bodies as possible, whereupon notices to that effect were sent to all known plot-owners. The graves of those whose friends had moved away, died or disappeared, were taken in charge by a committee, and the bodies were removed to one vast pit. The horrified and tender-hearted Mrs. Lindsay said, "It's hard lines to think one can't rest quiet even in a grave. But my! Won't there be a scrambling and a sorting of themselves at the last day!"

The schoolhouse went up, and the sward in a couple of years was a joy to one's eye—that is, all but one plot, and that plot came to be known as Kippan's Island. He scouted his notice and defied them to touch his property; the wooden railing about it fell during the time of strife; the surrounding earth was sloped and levelled;

## Committed to his Charge

the few stones remaining were laid flat in the sod to become moss-grown spots of whiteness in it; and at a superior height of a foot and a half was Kippan's Island, where the stone above dearly-beloved wife Number One bowed at an unseemly angle to the stone devoted to Number Two. Number One, with her two babies, was typified by a sheep and two lambs; Number Two, with one baby, was a modest sheep with but one lamb; and Number Three, surrounded by half a dozen mounds representing little Kippans, had no decorations beyond a simple register of names and dates. As the long-suffering husband and father had said, "Bless my heart, 'twould be a flock this time, and beyond the power of stonecutter! Besides it's a sight o' money to put in fancies."

Possibly he meant to say in sentiment. Fond as he was of his Bible, and glibly as some of its sentences fell at most times from his lips, in the matter of burial he had given his preference to secular poetry. Below the sheep and one lamb the broken letters read—

Farewell my home and husband dear,  
I am not dead, but sleeping here,  
Prepare to die, for die you must,  
And with me and baby lie in dust.

## Committed to his Charge

The sheep and two lambs testified that—

A loving wife lies moldering here,  
She left a home and husband dear.  
Ready we are, for die we must,  
And with our partners lie in dust.

To their shame be it said, when the Huntleys first stood to read this sad epitome of one man's three-fold effort at matrimony, they laughed until, as Helen said, "they fairly cried."

"Notice the Royal We! It is worthy of Henry the Eighth! And how he makes the most of his rhymes!"

"And preserves a strict neutrality," said Tom, "'Our partners'—awful thought!"

"Poor Number Three hasn't sheep, lamb or verse," sighed Helen. "Do you remember the epitaph—

Here lies the mother of children seven,  
Five on earth and two in Heaven,  
The two in Heaven preferring rather,  
To die with Mother than live with Father?

"That might have been altered to suit. *I* couldn't blame anyone for preferring to die, rather than live with that dreadful old Orangeman."

The unknown surface was covered with tussocks and wandering arms of briar, a spot of ugliness in a God's-acre of cared-for beauty, "a

## Committed to his Charge

public monument to man's foolishness and obstinacy, but, in the owner's estimation, a proclamation of independence and steadfastness of purpose," thought Tom Huntley.

"You have a nice house here," said the Rector genially, as he fingered his glass with its modest amount of toddy. "Stone off your own place, I suppose."

"Every chip of it, sir; field stone squared with a hammer. My first wife—no, my second, did many a square of it. Yes, my second; for my first and me, we lived in the log. She got that handy with her hammer that she put by all her own work separate, and a goodly pile she showed. She was a smart woman my second, she as has one lamb to her headstone. We saved the chips for fillin', and the rubble went to the bank barns. Best barns in all the country, *they* are."

"My wife and I were admiring them as we came up. Why don't you plant a few vines here and there on your stone walls? Have you quite forgotten the Old Country?"

"Twelve years old when I came, sir, and blazed a way through the bush with my uncle and gran'father. Orphan boy I was, and not of much account. No, I don't remember much.

## Committed to his Charge

As to vines, they're no use as I can see. My son Richard planted some stannard roses, but I dug 'em up"—here the stick marked time viciously—"threw 'em out"—another pound on the floor—"truck, I call it, with never a crop or fruit on it. What do we want with vines and stannard roses, say I. Oranges lilies are good enough for me, and I don't object to the Missus havin' a bunch of sweet herbs. Sugar, sir? Fill up; more of the cake? Eat yer fill; God knows I don't begrudge ye. My wife's a rare one to bake. Say, wife," and he turned and bawled towards the room where he knew the ladies to be, "haven't ye got a turkey's egg or two to give 'em to take home for their breakfasts? Turkey's eggs is full of meat, sir, and more delicater nor a hen's—not that I take much stock in delicacies," and he laughed a hard, dry laugh.

Then he wished to demonstrate his interest in the parish.

"How's them wimmin societies gettin' on? And how 'bout it, or summat that way? I've never been in this church myself, except to vestries and funerals. I like the old one better. Good box stoves and a long pipe that heated us better nor these new-fangled furnaces. The pipe

## Committed to his Charge

dripped a bit. I remember my—second—yes my second, had a good bonnet spoiled that way; a new bonnet, too. We allus drew up and smoked a pipe round the stove, us farmers in the olden days. Kind o' prepared ye for the sermon, to have a chat about the crops first. It was better than meetin' in the market-place, warm and comfortable, and no worry of business. Nothing would do the old Rector and Lawyer Lucy but to take it down an' build a new one. To my mind it was like the story, in my boys' book, of the thousand dollar andirons, one thing after another, money, money, money!"—thud, thud, thud from the stick. "My soul! You'd think we wuz made o' money to hear him preach. And then to spend it in this foolishness. Like them crosses, but I fixed *that*. In the cellar they went; and in the cellar they'll stay, till the day o' judgment—while I'm above ground anyway. And this last crazy business about givin' reg'lar in envelopes—they do say it's you is to blame for that. I shan't put my name down for a penny. Let them as goes pay, say I. When my wife has time to go she gets her ten cents; but no time, no go, no go, no ten cents!"

At last the Rector drew his peculiar parishioner

## Committed to his Charge

into the open air and kept him talking of crops and stock until the dipping sun gave warning that the fine warmth was not of summer, and that autumn twilight was short. The apples and cream were reinforced by the turkey eggs, and a promise was flung after the retreating carriage of potatoes and a flitch of bacon in a month's time.

"How do you like being a country parson's lady?" said the Rector, as he stooped to readjust the refractory apples. "For myself, I feel like a lucky specimen of a tramp."

"Well enough," was Helen's reply, a trifle of fatigue in her voice. "I do wish eggs didn't break so easily. At every jolt I expect to have a handful of custards."

"The things are all useful and factors in comfort, but even if the bother outweighed the gain and we were twice as independent of 'donations' as we are, we are bound to remember our possible successors and not let good customs lapse. You are tired, love; a cup of tea will set us up."

A short silence was occupied in effort to keep the provisions in their proper places, while the willing horse made good time homewards.

## Committed to his Charge

"What a Tartar!" said the Rector, "yet not without parts and actions calling for admiration.

"Not for emulation, I hope."

"My dear, his are heaven-born gifts, added to by exceptional circumstances, none of which are ours. If there were many such as he this country would be the scene of civil war. His kind were useful in their own day and generation, but nothing except death will convince him or them that the day is past."

"And do you mean to say we have to wait until then to make any improvement here?" asked Helen, indignation and despair in her voice.

"By no means. Wait for two years, and see if the organ and Miss Sweeting, and the Webbs and Granny Quick are not all unrecognisable."

At his school the Reverend Thomas Huntley's word had been law. His manly nature, his love for healthy sports, his power of sympathy, went to make him a hero with his boys. For over ten years he had been a controlling force, and it would go hard with him now to find his wishes or his commands denied.



## CHAPTER VIII

### THE CHOIR TERRESTRIAL

THE Huntleys wished for a service different from the one so far provided in Slowford. They had been warned of certain prejudices, so they resolved to go, as they supposed, slowly, but never doubted their ability to accomplish desirable ends in time. The things and people requiring to be remedied were so many, and the *dénouements* so unlooked for, that it was hard to judge where to begin the work of reconstruction.

The organ was in woful plight, dumb when bidden to speak, and moaning when supposed to be silent. The organist's flights of fancy in themes and their variations, and his taste generally, could lead to complications more serious than those entailed during mechanical repairs. Mr. Huntley wished for a *Te Deum* sung antiphonally to two chants, a major and a minor, with a final return to the former. He liked the commas lightly observed and the words upon

## Committed to his Charge

the reciting note made intelligible, sung as they would be said; rebellion was in his heart against Jackson, made more elaborate by the Misses Sweeting and Webb and Mr. Webb than even Jackson himself intended; he objected to such words as "peopul" and "generaizshun to generaizshun," and to startling accelerando and pathetic rallentando intended to display the staying power of bass and soprano. His power of endurance would not stretch, and he silently decided on the reorganisation of the choir. But the man at the key-board—what was to be done with him? The Rector would amble comfortably along in his dream of reconstruction, until suddenly stopped at this question. For it was a perplexing one. The salary was badly needed towards covering six bare bodies and filling as many hungry mouths. Hitherto Carney had been the standing economy of the Church, but he now permitted himself to hope for better times. "You know, Carney," had said Mr. Low more than once, when the former's salary had been made pay for some Committee freak, "you know we are the poorest congregation in the town." "And the meanest," had added Carney mentally, as he turned into his humble

## Committed to his Charge

dwelling, to confront the size of his family and the risen price of coal. It is to be feared that his experience with vestrymen and clergy had taken the edge off faith. He had found men inside the Church pretty much on a par with the story-book grocer, who sanded his sugar and watered his vinegar before calling the family to prayers; so when he accepted a Church promise he liked it in black and white, and endorsed more heavily than the Banks require. "I find," said Carney, "that men often do within the church that which they would not dare do in the market-place."

Had the Rector to see the organist as well as hear him, his distress increased. The first glimpse at the man's back told the tempo and time. Triple or duple, andante or presto, the swayings and heavings of that ample figure, as its back loomed before the congregation, gave as plain indication as conductor's baton. When Miss Webb closed her hymn-book with a bang, a notice that the words were memorized and *she* needed no assistance from print, the hearers were commanded to "Come and praise the Lord with *me*," then Carney's leg service in the recurring notes in that, or in dear old Wareham, was

## Committed to his Charge

a feat in gymnastics not to be forgotten. His use of the tremolo was excessive, and the Rector's musical soul quivered sympathetically.

But all this was as nothing to the agony of those Sundays when Miss Sweeting favoured the congregation with her one solo. It occurred in a hymn made beautiful to Huntley by many memories, a double sacrilege, for devotional sentiment was not more outraged than that of his heart. The tune, or rather the aria, was a work of supererogation, being the organist's own composition; composition was not in his bond with the wardens. The aria was not reduced to writing, knowledge not having reached that point with either organist or prima donna; but there were passages in it which conveyed black showers of sixteenths and thirty-seconds to a listener's mental sight, and words were elongated and multisyllabled to suit the errant fancy of the composer, until wounds were lacerated into woo-oonds, with many oo's between. But the excruciating part, the one thing not to be borne, was the recurring inquiry, an inquiry that had sunk deep into his own heart many a time, one that had brought forth an answer of tears and blood. When Miss Sweeting turned to the

## Committed to his Charge

congregation and bleated, "Say, poor sinner lov'st thou Me?" in a manner intended to be dramatic but in truth slightly hilarious, he could not but determine that this solo should follow Jackson.

It was soon known that solos should be no more, and Miss Sweeting was kindly, but firmly requested not to put that question of hers to the congregation again. Her rendering made it purely personal, robbed it of all sacredness, and obliterated the quotation. The organist was outwardly amiable over the restrictions placed upon him, for the anticipatory pleasure derived from the hope of a renewed organ was cleverly made to cover what might have been his hurt feelings. An organ fund was begun, headed by the Rector's generous donation, and it was now only a question of time as to when Peter's Nux Vomica should be added and the whole instrument have an overhauling.

Hitherto there had been a weekly sorting of the voices, based on personal friendliness rather than on vocal qualification. If it pleased a tenor to sit next a bass, or even, as is often wished still in all parishes, next a soprano, there was no trouble made about it ; and indeed,

## Committed to his Charge

why not, for half the men sang air or improvised parts as they went. One might often hear, "What a beautiful tenor Mr. Warner made today!" the explanation of which was that the fifth of the key in question was Mr. Warner's best note, and as the tune was one without sufficient variety to let his fifth become a discord, he managed, by running down to the third at the final bar and putting in plenty of vibrato, to "fairly bring the tears" to Mrs. Lindsay's eyes. He often filled the Rector with emotion, but not the kind designated by Mrs. Lindsay.

There was nothing arbitrary about the choir management. The Misses Webb and their father, the most united trio possible, had never, in all these years, been separated. Mr. Webb's vision was half gone, and to assist the remaining half he used a glass of the size and shape of a miniature locomotive headlight. This weapon was troublesome to focus. A vestal sat on either side of him, and this united family used but one book, thus leaving Mr. Webb free to try his glass at each and every distance between his nose and the print. Up went the eyebrows and the lips shot out, a preparatory position; the glass was fixed—perhaps catching a stray sun-

## Committed to his Charge

beam and threatening to burn a hole in Miss Pamela's best gown—and the melody began. Mr. Webb's mouth deserves special mention. Looking at him for the first time when in the throes of sound, the Rector had thought of his study ink-bottle, a dog's head in half size, the lower and upper jaws connected by an unobtrusive hinge. In Mr. Webb's case the hinge was a trifle larger, but almost as unobtrusive, and a stranger might be pardoned for fearing the head would not remain intact. With a sudden high note the upper half flew ; then the excited observer decided the hinge was cracked and visibly widened ; but it stood the test, and the upper half returned in safety to its patient waiting fellow below. The Misses Webb's features were dutifully patterned upon those of their sire, but in stature they exceeded him, thus bringing the book they held to an angle awkward for him and his glass.

It was cruel to part them ; but after a vigorous examination as to whether Mr. Webb was bass or tenor, he was relegated to a seat with the former and for ever removed from the ministrations of Euphemia and Pamela.

The Rector had already managed the intro-

## Committed to his Charge

duction of a quiet Kyrie, and had insisted upon an opening hymn in the evening, for the purpose of getting the choir into place in proper time. A late arrival at church was affected by many, and was supposed to indicate a leaning toward fashion, since it was a mark of gentility to disturb the devotion of humbler brethren.

Mrs. Stuart had once said to Mrs. Lindsay, "I like a seat in the back of the Church best. Oh, for ever so many reasons. You can slip in late, for one thing, and," with increasing candour, "you can see everyone better, for another."

"Oh, but," said Mrs. Lindsay, "when *I* come late I don't care to slip in, and it's just because you *are* better seen that I like to sit forward. It's better to be worth being looked at than to look at other people's bonnets for a century, *I* think."

And so Mrs. Lindsay and Mrs. Lyte, and the noisy Delaboughs from Neverdonefillin', came in at all times between the Confession and the middle of the Psalms. To check this the Rector had the sidesmen close the doors just before the beginning of the Confession, to remain closed until the Psalms should be begun. This was felt to be an infringement of privilege,



## Committed to his Charge

the blocking up of an ancient right of way. Mrs. Forby was never late; her claims to prominence rested on no such flimsy subterfuge. But she felt that an unwarrantable liberty had been taken, and acidly remarked that the schoolmaster was abroad.

"Just so," said Mrs. Lindsay: "bin accustomed to a row of boys and tap 'em on the head when he'd a mind to. Now I object most sterterously to being tapped. I never was a scrapegoat."

However, nothing was said in public, perhaps on the principle that if anyone, even a Rector, were given rope enough, a hanging of some kind was sure to follow. They liked their new parson, and his salutation or ready answering smile disarmed all animosity or smouldering anger. But they wished to have him at their own price, trusting that he would out run general patience and so bring about that consummation. They numbered his introduction of a vocal Kyrie as one of his transgressions, and yet were thankful for its effect.

Peter the sexton, as organ-blower and bell-ringer, has a place with the musicians. But he was more than a musician. Nature had intended him for a burglar, but turned him into

## Committed to his Charge

a soldier ; then the Church found him and made him a sexton. Once there had been an upheaval in Slowford, and the Lucys went abroad ; they sailed down the St. Lawrence, spent a few days in Toronto, Montreal and Quebec, and by some sleight of travel reached far-away New York. During that memorable trip nothing impressed Mrs. Lucy so much as a Sunday's experience in a Canadian Cathedral, where a few transplanted beadies aired their old-world glories of blue and red. Pious, with a trifle of ostentation in her piety, she made thank-offering for the hymn for those at sea—sung once each Sunday during her absence, and brought Peter a new habit. Her sense of propriety forbade that he should be turned into a beadle, therefore the suit was an ordinary one of bright dark-blue faced with red, red stripes on the trousers, and glittering with brass wherever a button could be put. Peter in mufti provoked a smile ; Peter as an organ-grinder's monkey was irresistible.

It was the custom to have the Baptismal Service on the last Sunday of the month, after the second Morning Lesson, the babies housed meantime in the Vestry, where the mothers gathered without much regard to time and

## Committed to his Charge

whence sundry sounds, neither musical nor devotional, were wafted. If there were baptisms, a hymn suitable to the occasion had to be forthcoming and a stoppage made before the Apostles' Creed; but if there were no babies it was desirable the service should proceed without a hitch. So, on this fixed date, Peter made his appearance in the little Vestry door opposite the organ mirror, and by pantomime gave directions. If there were babies, he held up a corresponding number of fingers and dandled an imaginary infant in his arms, his lips pursed into a pantomimic "whid-ge"; no babies, and his arms hung at his side, his eyes were cast down, and he shook his head sadly. For two months the Rector saw the silent performance, the first time too surprised to grasp it, and on the second not sufficiently recovered to prevent it.

The blow-box was the coign of vantage from which Peter surveyed, between the false pipes, the congregation and its doings. The unwary dog, the nervous young mother with restless child, the chattering lads in the gallery, all received attention during lulls in the blowing—an operation which Peter called "givin' 'em wind," and no service was felt to be complete

## Committed to his Charge

without several headers to and fro from the blow-box. After a particularly heavy post-lude he invariably emerged mopping his bald head, and panting "I say! Didn't we give it to 'em that time?"

One Sunday, after some obstinacy on the part of the bell, the eleven strokes of the clock sounded as Peter was yet struggling with the ropes. In silence choir and Rector prepared to file in, while Carney, in one of his day-dreams sat inactive, such a creature of habit that the idea of playing without a preparatory bell never occurred to him, nor would occur if he sat there till sundown. Up the aisle, with noiseless tread, after the manner of the stage burglar, came Peter, and waving his arms as he stooped to the blow-box door, in true stage whisper commanded Carney "to let her (the organ) go! She (the bell) has slipped her collar!"

Every parish has its remarkable old people, and the one most remarkable here was Peter's great friend, Granny Quick. Of course pews in Slowford were rented, ground rents many of them, to be inherited like any other property. Near the front of the Church were two pews dedicated to strangers, and in one of them on

## Committed to his Charge

the first Sunday, in the new building, many years gone by, Granny Quick installed herself for all time. Her sense of religious duty and the obligation of unselfishness caused her devotions to be public; silent prayer was a thing unknown to her. From beginning to end, of Matins or Evensong, she officiated; and her duty in Exhortation, Absolution and Confession, Collect, Epistle, the announcement of hymns and final blessing, was faithfully performed. Age and a defective early education made reading difficult, so in the less familiar parts of the service she laboured painfully in the wake of the Rector; in all accustomed pages she led him, often with an expression in her tone and bearing indicating impatience with his lack of promptness. The last Rector had grown old with her, and did not care; perhaps the scientific mind of which Miss Sweeting complained was above small annoyances. To the new Rector she was intolerable, particularly in the Ante-Communion Office. Her laconic rendering made the shorter Commandments fall like bullets about her; but the innovation of singing in an unaccustomed place was so disconcerting that for many Sundays she was

## Committed to his Charge

silent, though exasperated. The Rector fervently hoped she was too old to learn new ways, and prided himself not a little upon his stratagem—one which made an improvement in the service and put a block in his rival's path at the same time.

Anything in the shape of change dismayed her. An epidemic of cold once caused a depleted choir, Jackson was discarded, and the beautiful words were said, not sung. Mrs. Quick was flurried, almost angry. When the Rector, in his turn at the last, begged that he might "never be confounded," she, in a panic of forgetfulness, gave forth the first half of the Gloria. Finding herself in solo, she turned about with a wondering and condemning look, finished her share, and expected the Rector to take the second part. The congregation was seated, and a painful silence warned her that something had gone amiss; she acknowledged no defeat, and a snort and an angry founce made her finale. The Rector felt that the time had come for remonstrance against this grievance; and very kindly was she afterwards shown the portions of the service open to her; but he begged her to allow him a monopoly of the rest.

## Committed to his Charge

What offence this might have led to can only be conjectured, because in that interview he found that the history of her life was one of interest, calling for pity and help. She was the widow of a farmer who had been counted wealthy, but who had left her only the sum of one thousand dollars as provision for the rest of her life. This, with a cottage of two tiny rooms, was her all. She was unable to work, and the interest on the sum failed to support her. She then made a division of her principal, allowing to herself a life of so many possible, not probable, years. Now she found her hoard decreased by half, while increasing years left no sign upon her health. She had served her husband long and faithfully, tending him and their children; she had watched the latter die before they reached maturity; she had worked in the fields, gathered roots in the early November storms, shingled their roof, driven their cattle to and from water in the drought; her arms were out of all proportion, lengthened by many heavy liftings, and the old grey head was bowed far in front of where Nature intended it to be. When the husband became a townsman he was seized with a desire for fame and reputation for generosity;

## Committed to his Charge

so he willed their few thousands, which she had more than helped to make, towards the building of an hospital.

"So much for the laws men make," commented Mrs. Lindsay. "What does a woman own, anyway? About time they got the vote!" and Mrs. Forby voted her a bold hussie, and no true woman.

The Rector took the remnant of money, reinvested it, and made it his business to induce the Hospital Trust to provide a permanent home for the old woman in the building. This, with the rental of her cottage, would suffice.

"Upon my word! A dependent where she ought to be owner," said Mrs. Lindsay. "Not but what it's good of the Rector. If all men were like him we wouldn't want the vote. My word, when we get it, won't things go hopping!"

"Yes, *when* you do," returned Mrs. Forby. "Men have more sense than to give it to you. Hasn't a man a right to do what he will with his own?"

"Yes, but not with his wife's," was the retort.

The strife was abandoned when they met on the common, practical ground of providing



## Committed to his Charge

Granny Quick with a *trousseau* suitable to her new position. In summer her costume had hitherto been a brown alpaca, the skirt cut so that the ample width of the wearer's figure was set off to fullest advantage, a shawl that had once been white, with arabesques of a Persian character straying into the centre, and a bonnet made of a man's ten-cent harvesting hat, tied below the chin and the back finished by a curtain. She had been the recipient of many clippings from the ladies of the Guild, and the curtain was a species of record of Mrs. Forby's blue, or Mrs. Lindsay's *gros de Naples*. An unkind fate made the contemporary strings blue when the curtain was purple, and green when the curtain was blue. The straw had changed from its blonde faith into a complexion of no colour in particular, and there were sharp cracks, indicative of a final break-up. As a preliminary, and to avoid possible discussion, Mrs. Forby burnt the bonnet and then broke the news gently as she stood before its former owner. Mrs. Forby's sewing apron was full of contributions towards new curtains; but a cry went up from the poor old soul, whose remaining instincts of feminine vanity could not be directed towards

## Committed to his Charge

the making of a successor to her treasure. She hurried to the little bedroom and brought out the headgear which took the place of straw during the winter months, and for the remainder of the visitation from the ladies kept it in her own hands. As a sample of what might be done in velvet and fur, it rivalled its defunct sister. Properly speaking, it had once been velvet and fur. The pile of the former was now gone, unless in patches, and the hair of the fur had long left its skin the triumphant survivor. The new bonnet was only worn once, on the trip to the Hospital—a trip made in a cab and with circumstance and pomp new to Granny Quick. It may have been the unaccustomed drive, or it may have been the new bonnet; but she never again entered the Church doors until they opened to her for that last time when earthly silence had begun for her forever.

Poor patient drudge, willing helpmeet to one who knew no rights but as he could make them his own, she had entered the choir celestial.

## CHAPTER IX     †

### A TEAPOT TEMPEST

ACCORDINGLY, Mrs. Huntley asked Miss Sweeting to bring her work over on the Wednesday afternoon and sit with her. Would Miss Sweeting stay to dinner if Mrs. Lucy could spare her? Mrs. Huntley asked Mrs. Stuart to do the same, much to that lady's surprise. The latter arrived in the less faded of her two black silks, cap basket in her hand, and a bit of fancy work folded in the corner of the cap. Her one vanity was her cap, and Mrs. Stuart looked very young to wear one. Mrs. Lindsay was sure she was hiding a permanently bald spot.

She was seated by the fire in the Rectory drawing-room, when Miss Sweeting, also work in hand, entered. Surprise was on the newcomer's face, but a pleased surprise. Mrs. Stuart did not resent it, but smiled back with warmth and equanimity.

## Committed to his Charge

"I don't suppose," said Helen, settling herself, "that we shall have anyone; I should think there could be no one left. But its always as well to be sure," and she looked from the extra cups, beside the remains of Mrs. Forby's cake on the wicker table, to the trivet where the brass kettle hissed. "There seems no end to that plum cake. There were pounds and pounds of it—I never saw so much plum cake in one piece before. You know Mrs. Forby made it for our At Home, and it was not touched, and it has lasted ever since, with my own light cake."

Mrs. Stuart smiled; she remembered Mrs. Forby's eight pound plum cake, but Miss Sweeting's face took on an expression not altogether pleasing. She was a person of small victories and great spites. Try as she would, the Guild held her in its debt; she could never pay in full. Helen calmly went on.

"If nobody comes we shall have a cup by ourselves—it will brighten our minds over the Harvest Home scheme."

Miss Sweeting said nothing, but smiled, in her consciously superior way, at the prospect of no callers. Soon they were all deep in the

## Committed to his Charge

mysteries of oaten and wheaten letters and paper panels.

"Straw hats, coarse ones, make beautiful letters," said Helen, "and they are much cleaner and easier than the grain in every way."

"Granny Quick's bonnet would have been a bonanza," smiled Mrs. Stuart, and they diverged for a minute to the new bonnet-making and the poor old woman's translation to the hospital a day or two before.

"If we get straw plait for 'God giveth the increase,' we could fill all that bare expanse in the front of the Communion Table. I wonder if somebody wouldn't give us a new altar—it would be a nice thank-offering, and much needed."

Miss Sweeting hinted that thankfulness did not take that active form of expression in Slowford.

Mrs. Stuart looked up from her work.

"I had quite forgotten, but years ago a long scroll was given me for such a purpose. It is hidden somewhere in a box. I'll look for it, and bring it out—'The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof! sing ye His praises with understanding.' I had forgotten all about it."

## Committed to his Charge

"Capital," said Helen. The admission from Mrs. Stuart that this was not, as with the others, her first introduction to such ideas, drew her towards the gentle-looking woman with a sense of something common between them. "Capital; and it can go along the gallery. We'll trim the pillars underneath it with wreathing."

Here Miss Sweeting moved towards the window and stood looking down the street.

"What is it?" asked Helen. The nurse was out with the children, and her first thought was of them.

"Callers, I think," said Miss Sweeting, clearing her throat and making room for Helen to stand beside her.

"Do you mean people coming here?" asked Helen, relieved about her babies. "Do you mean all those people? How funny they should come in such a body! And look," as she turned to the opposite side of the bay window, "here are six more—that is, if they are all coming here. And I hope they are," she added hospitably, surprise still in her voice as she moved towards the plum cake, from which she cut some tiny bits, putting them on a Sevres plate abstracted from its usual position on a

## Committed to his Charge

wall. This plate and its hanging shelf had provoked Mrs. Forby into saying, after her first call, that she did not admire kitchen decorations in a drawing-room.

Miss Sweeting made another effort. Twice her mouth opened and shut; Mrs. Stuart looked on in quiet amusement. The first ring, clanging through the house, precipitated her information.

“I think—I think there has been some mistake. Your cards with Wednesday, you know——”

A swift, bright blush overspread Helen's cheek. But the enemy was upon her, and she advanced to meet it. One party of three led the way; then came four belonging to a different set, who, after shaking hands, seated themselves stiffly on the other side of the room. For a moment Helen was full of genuine distress; then hospitality, amusement, a variety of emotions, chased it away, and she met a fresh horde, ushered in by Mary. All were in their best, all stiff, and keen eyes taking in everything. There was a look of inquiry on every face. Helen turned to Miss Sweeting.

“Would you mind seeing if Ann has come in? If she has, tell her to bring in the children. I

## Committed to his Charge

want to show you all my babies," and she beamed on the roomful in a way that made them all baby-lovers in a moment. She put her own wicker chair before the tea table. "Mrs. Stuart, will you come here and make tea for me? There are so many questions I want to ask, and things to talk about." She turned to Miss Amy Lyte, who stood shyly beside her mother's chair, looking very awkward. An end had come to the seats and the girl felt herself in the way. "Miss Amy, will you go and help Mrs. Stuart? Take Mrs. Forby a cup of tea, and be sure she has lots of cream—I know you like lots of cream."

There was complete silence in the room, save for her own voice and the mild clatter Mrs. Stuart was making with china and silver. The children entered, Ann walking grimly at the head of the procession, with baby in her arms. They were frank little things and all like their mother. Pinkie's two little hands held a large apple, and Mrs. Forby asked the child what she was going to do with it.

"I'm going to make a core of it in a minute," was the grave answer, and the faint murmur of the moment before swelled into a laugh. But it



## Committed to his Charge

died. The young mother quickly distributed her children, and, joy of joys, a faint buzz of conversation rose from the different groups.

Helen turned to the nurse.

“Ann, go quickly and cut me some thin bread and butter. You will find some macaroons and a white cake uncut in the sideboard.”

She gave the woman a look of trust, which brought out a corresponding one in return. Ann went off with the sideboard keys, smiling grimly when her back was to the roomful; she wondered what had possessed her master and mistress to come to this wilderness.

“I suppose it is a surprise party,” she said to herself, as she arranged her cake and prepared her bread and butter. “Here, Mary, lend a hand—land! there’s the bell again. One would think it was a funeral. How many this time?” as Mary returned. “And are the others all staying? Sakes alive! Whatever will the missus do with them! Was Master Punch behavin’ himself, did you notice? Here, take in this plate, you, and I’ll follow with another. Bell again! Cream? Yes, plenty, skim that bowl. Here’s the other sugar basin, they’ll be runnin’ out of that, too. Is that the baby?”

## Committed to his Charge

Reassured that it was not, she continued her labours.

“Give me another loaf, and bring me a pat of butter. Is the plum cake all done? Bring out the teapot when you come back, I’ve got fresh brewing.”

In the drawing-room Helen was busy, but no longer in despair. The children had thawed out some of the less austere ones, and Miss Sweeting was aiding her by moving about the groups. But there were those who continued to look forlorn and neglected in spite of all effort.

Mrs. Stuart turned to the Japanese chiffonier where Helen kept her drawing-room china, an old pink set of great age, and helped herself to what she needed.

“Bless that woman,” thought Helen; “but, oh, *dear!* I hope she’ll be careful—it is dreadful to see so much of it out at once.” For the pink china was a kind of fetich; no servant hand, nor even Ann’s, was ever allowed to touch it.

There were some who declined refreshment, and their office of spectator was merged into that of judge. Mrs. Forby was one. Mrs. Lindsay, on the contrary, took two cups, thereby distressing Mrs. Stuart, whose cream was again giving

## Committed to his Charge

out. A stout person, sitting in what was intended to be an easy chair, but looking grim as an executioner, replied to the tea-maker's kind offer with, "No, I thank you, I never eat between meals." Mrs. Sampson, sympathetic, willing to be pleased and feeling the chill in certain refusals, accepted Helen's plate of cake *in toto*, ate what she could of it, and emptied her lapful of crumbs into the fire.

To the stout lady who would not eat, Helen brought the baby. The infant was flat on its back before the fire, its open pelisse disclosing an elaborate wealth of white skirts and embroideries. The mother placed her in the woman's arms, thinking "You may refuse a cup of tea, but such a sight as that will surely melt you."

And so it did; but not to a degree which prevented a mental stock-taking of embroidery, lace and laundry work unusual in Slowford. "Two hired girls, and a wash-woman every week. She'd need to have a private fortune. Poor man, no doubt she'll ruin him yet." No woman in Slowford had ever possessed means of her own; it hung in the balance whether such possession were praiseworthy or the reverse. As

## Committed to his Charge

Helen was the first, there would be two counts in the indictment; for a clergyman's place was to these right-thinking minds one of poverty. This innovation was to be combated domestically, as one in parish matters should be in the vestry.

The baby gurgled and goo'd, and went through the performance, vocal and pantomimic, so pretty in a good child and dear to every woman's eye and heart. "Bless you," said the visitor, as she kissed and grudgingly handed her to another admirer, "you are a lovely babe."

The invasion had taken place about four o'clock. The simultaneous action argued that it must have been preconcerted. It was easy enough to come. At least, when they were safely arrived, it thus seemed in retrospect. But it was another matter to go; now that the moment approached, it seemed to entail a superhuman effort of which no one felt herself capable. It had taken quite an hour to bring in dining-room and library chairs, to pour and to brew, to cut cake and bread, and to set at work those who were amiable enough to eat and drink. The cups had been gathered in, with many shy looks from Helen in fear for their

## Committed to his Charge

safety ; Mrs. Low, wife of the People's Warden, apologised for her crumbs, and another good body, wishing to put her at her ease, said that "Mrs. Huntley could not call her to account, seeing as she had no plate." Inwardly, both wondered why Mrs. Sampson had been singled out for the dignity of that Sèvres plate.

Such conversation as there had been came to a sudden end, and the original stillness, with a sense of eyes everywhere, again took possession of the room. Chairs, as they had been brought in by Miss Sweeting and the servants, were placed here, there and everywhere, but by that process of selection known in country drawing-rooms they got themselves ranged round the wall. This left a hollow square, which Helen had pretty much to herself, and she felt that she and the children were giving an afternoon performance for the delectation of the feminine congregation.

"Now," thought she, surveying the enemy and counting her own forces, "I'll send away the children and bring out the albums, and if that doesn't frighten them off, they must just stay until their husbands come to fetch them."

But the exit of the children served as a hint,

## Committed to his Charge

and the silence was broken by several painful throat-raspings of doubt and perplexity.

Mrs. Forby, as usual, to the rescue. She rose from her chair, with the ease of a rheumatic Dutch doll. Mrs. Lindsay was a quick second, and Mrs. Lyte followed her. The rest of the room rose as one woman, and Helen, remembering the half of the proverb to speed the parting guest, bowed and smiled and shook them out, one by one.

"Thank you for a very pleasant afternoon," said Mrs. Forby, her looks sadly belying her words. Mrs. Lindsay said something a trifle more genial, and with a look of amusement; for Mrs. Lindsay could enjoy a joke, even at her own expense, and two minutes in that room had opened her eyes to the truth. For the rest, they departed as silently as they had come, their wonder, for the most part, increased. The mystery had not been cleared up.

Mrs. Forby and her two friends walked down the street abreast, for some time in silence. Now that it was over, Mrs. Lindsay's impression was that she had known all along it was a mistake and that she had gone simply because the others had.

## Committed to his Charge

"Well, I am glad I went," she said, "even if it was not very lively. I just wanted to see what it would be like."

"Then I hope you are satisfied," replied Mrs. Forby. "*I* went because I thought I was asked; but I shan't darken their doorsteps again unless I am asked properly. I have thought her a beautiful housekeeper, and so I think yet—in some ways, but to-day she managed *very* badly. There was no management at all. That old Ann just ran in and out. If that is the present style then give me the old one, when you know how many you ask and how many are coming and how much you require. Nature never intended me for a gipsy, sitting anywhere and eating anything anyhow. I hate scrimping. Did you see the size of those pieces of cake?"

"I thought everything very pretty," said Mrs. Lyte, "if only one were accustomed to it. Did you see those doyleys, and the cover on the basket table? Beautiful. I must learn that kind of work. They are dear little children, too, and so good. *I* think her a beautiful manager, for I'm sure she didn't expect one of us."

"Then why on earth did she ask us?" cried Mrs. Forby shrilly. "Is this new style like the

## Committed to his Charge

Prince of Wales' presents in India, to be returned the next day! Well, we are ignorant in good company; for by the newspaper accounts he made his mistake and kept the presents. For myself, I don't pretend to be up in such high ways."

The last was intended for Mrs. Lindsay and Mrs. Lyte, for they had, in Mrs. Forby's opinion, equivocated to themselves and to her. Mrs. Forby was nothing if not honest.

"Miss Sweeting said"—began Mrs. Lyte.

"Dulcie Sweeting's a most meddling thing," and Mrs. Forby was vexed in her heart that she had not heeded Dulcie's well-meant hints. "If Dulcie Sweeting had only held her tongue, ten to one we shouldn't have gone at all. At least, —I wouldn't. She always affects me that way. And to see her there, acting as if she was at home! I never did see anything like that woman's power of settling. A setting hen can't be named in the same day with her. They'd better take care, give her a firm footing, and they'll never get her out again. She will surprise them some day, by leaving the Lucys and transporting herself to the Rectory for good." Mrs. Forby remembered her words in after times, and felt the thrill of the prophetsess.



## Committed to his Charge

"There's nothing to be offended about," said Mrs. Lindsay; "that is, that I can see," she added, in deference to Mrs. Forby's acknowledged superiority. "I didn't think anything of Miss Sweeting being there—I expect her to be there always; but Mrs. Stuart did surprise me. She's different, if you like."

"Different! I should think so!" Mrs. Forby was glad of a new offence, and having found one she grew more amiable towards Mrs. Lindsay. "I don't object to Mrs. Stuart; I always liked her. But I *do* object to Mrs. Huntley coming here to teach us what we could find out for ourselves."

"But we didn't," replied Mrs. Lindsay, "and perhaps she thought we were a trifle slow in finding out."

This was more large-minded than was usual with Mrs. Lindsay; for, like all people who have climbed over the wall, she was very particular as to those who should follow her that way, by the gate, or indeed by any way.

"She says she is a Stuart of Appin," said Mrs. Lyte; "a Stuart of Appin, whatever that may be."

"Sounds like the County Fall Show,"

## Committed to his Charge

suggested Mrs. Lindsay. "Stuart of Appin, Appin of Stuart, it's all one. She married her cousin, so her boy told my Jim."

Mrs. Lyte of Dunfillan had a happy thought.

"Appin is probably the name of their place in the Old Country."

"Well, they have none in this," said Mrs. Forby, "and that is where we all live."

"These people seem to me to be in a story," continued Mrs. Lindsay. The Rectory and its inmates fascinated her.

"Pooh!" said Mrs. Forby, "it's all their frills and laces, and Watteau backs, and ringing of bells for more tea. And her broad a's—they have a good deal to do with your story. Mrs. Lindsay, you are a goose."

"Perhaps I am, but I do confess they fascinate me, and I like wattle backs. His a's are broad, too."

"Oh, but he's an Englishman and can't help it. She's a Canadian and ought to know better."

"Well," said Mrs. Lyte, "those who know say the romance and the tragedy are going on all around us all the time, only we have not the wit to see them. We only realize them after they are put in print."

## Committed to his Charge

"Romance!" Mrs. Forby's tone was one of contempt. "Tragedy!" The tone turned to one of disbelief. "In this quiet place? We are too respectable."

The good woman intended no satire. Mrs. Lyte nodded her head and kept to her own opinion.

"Fancy me in a book!" continued Mrs. Forby, extending her arms so that her dramatic powers and ample figure had full scope. The movement disclosed a parabola in front, a parabola behind. "Fancy you in a love affair!" and she laughed wickedly. Mrs. Lyte tried to smile, but blinked gently; for in spite of circumstances and figure she had had visions. "Fancy Dulcie a heroine of romance!" The last was the fortissimo of Mrs. Forby's satire-crescendo, and the others joined her in it.

They were good wives, mothers and house-keepers, all three, but there ended the requirements of their lot, and, God bless them, also of their understandings.

Farther on in the town another group stood at the door of the chief pastry-cook's establishment.

"All the same I like her," said one. "She's

## Committed to his Charge

treated us all alike, even if her set-out wasn't handsome. You're coming home to tea with me, Miss Young? Let's go in and get something good; I had just enough of that cake to make me hungry. I feel as if I could relish something scalloped myself."

Miss Young laughed.

"I like her too, and her children are lovely. Did you notice the baby's things, and the girl called that little boy Master Punch. Master! Think of it, to a brat like that!" She laughed good-humouredly. "I wonder what Punch stands for."

"Didn't you hear her tell?" said the friend. "She made quite a story of it, how Marjory came to christen him that. Well, we'll go home and have a meal of victuals this time."

Helen's heart was full of gratitude to her two aides; but her first impulse, on shaking the last hand, was to do the same by them. She wanted to be alone, and she also wished to tell the tale to Tom on his return. But she swallowed her desires, and tried to be thankful for two such friends.

It was useless to try to disguise the truth to themselves, and yet prudence warned her that

## Committed to his Charge

one smile, one slip, one repetition of an incautious word, might do herself and her husband irreparable mischief. She divined Mrs. Stuart to be safe, but Miss Sweeting, she knew, could not and would not forbear.

"So, it went off very well," she said brightly. "And now to take back these chairs. Thanks ever so much." She rang the bell. "Ann, bring me baby, and tidy up. The pink china you can leave as usual. I always see to that myself, Mrs. Stuart. Mr. Huntley calls it one of my idols. He says if I found the baby in one basket and the pink china in another I would take the china, if only allowed one choice. But I wouldn't, would I, my precious!" and she hugged the white ball closer to her. "I feel faint for dinner. Ann, tell Mary to hurry it the moment she hears the Rector. How can I ever thank you both enough!"

"Indeed," minced Miss Sweeting, "I told several of them there was a mistake. I did my best."

Mrs. Stuart took up her work again. Helen was too truthful to pretend there had been no mistake, and hesitated a moment.

"It is a mistake I hope they may often make.

## Committed to his Charge

The Rector and I both want to see as much of the people as possible. Only, next time I hope we shall be better prepared."

"Do you look for it being a weekly visitation?" said Mrs. Stuart, smiling.

"Here is Tom!" cried Helen. "I hear his step," and she hastened to meet him, the baby on her arm. Out went the tiny hands, and there were more gurgles and baby-cries. In the face of the congregation—in the presence of Miss Sweeting and another, the husband and father stooped down and kissed them both.

## CHAPTER X.

### THE CHURCH MILITANT.

It was one o'clock in the morning and bitterly cold. The only thing still to be done was the placing of the letters on the Communion Table; all else was finished, and Peter was making a hideous dust with his broom.

Shabby as unplaced and unlighted stage properties, the text "God giveth the increase" lay in sections in a clothes-basket full of things ostensibly decorative.

Helen and her husband had worked until midnight, ably seconded by many of the Guild; and now only two, Mrs. Lindsay and Miss Sweeting, remained. Young Lindsay, who had come for his mother, expostulated and reported the night as growing stormy, quoted the thermometer hanging on the pulpit, but all without effect. They were determined to stay until they had finished the last letter. The lad rammed his hat well over his eyes, and went outside to promenade, declaring the outer air to be warmer

## Committed to his Charge

than the Church. It did not occur to his Slowford mind that he could expedite matters by giving assistance. The young men of the place took kindly after their fathers' examples in the matter of Church work. The four hands sorting the contents of the basket were blue and cold.

"There is no dearth of letters," said Miss Sweeting; "that is one thing to be thankful for. Suppose I take the upper words here to the left—the 'God giveth'—and you take 'the increase'? It will be ever so much quicker. Where's the big G?"

At close range the G, when found, much resembled Mrs. Quick's bonnet, but at the distance of a few feet it looked handsome, a golden glint striking from the points made at the turns.

"Mrs. Huntley is awfully clever over these things, isn't she?" remarked Mrs. Lindsay. "There seems nothing she can't do with them hands of hers."

The division of work was so even that they finished almost at the same moment. The wardens were chary of gas used out of hours, and this decoration was supposed to be done by lamplight. As the last touches were being put Peter gave them a warning.



## Committed to his Charge

"You'd better hurry. The oil's giving out, and the meaterer's turned off." He swept two or three flourishes with his broom, nearly choking them with particles of grain and dust. "I'll light my lantern, and that'll let us out of the Church."

They hastily put on their gloves, but there were no wraps to add, for they were already clad as for out of doors. Young Lindsay groped his way up the aisle.

"Well, mother, I suppose you'll come now the light's out. How does it look when you've got it finished?"

"Beautiful!" replied his mother, her teeth chattering. "I wish you had put on the kettle before you came out. I must have a drop of something before I go to bed. I'm about perished."

"I did put it on, and I cut you a sandwich, and the tumbler and the other things are ready. I do wish you would come. Here's your muff, Miss Sweeting, if that's what you're looking for. Peter, give me your lantern for a minute till I see the text."

He swung the lantern to increase the light. They heard him exclaim "Cricky!" and supposed it admiration. His mother and Miss

## Committed to his Charge

Sweeting came to look with him, but he resolutely turned the former face about and had them down the aisle before they could demur. They were too weary, too tired and cold, to resist much.

“Not if I know it,” he said to himself. “They are crazy enough to stay and undo it again.”

Thanksgiving Day was cold and fine, and the church was crowded. It is to be doubted if anything except a circus had ever moved Slowford so much before.

The anthem had been chosen by the Rector; except for its simplicity no fault could be found with it.

“Pore pa,” said Miss Euphemia, with a backward glance at the basses on this Thanksgiving Morning; “pore pa! However will he manage his glass this morning without the use of his two hands! But as the Rector said, the basses are weak, and his voice is quite lost here.”

All eyes were on the decorations. In the nave there was a general conception of colour and effect; but in the choir there was much criticism of detail, because the chancel was made the chief place of adornment.

Miss Euphemia's eyes roved about her. They

## Committed to his Charge

wore disapproving glances, but as yet she had not fixed upon anything she conscientiously could call High. Her disapproval was broad and not discriminating. An animated consultation was going on in the opposite choir seat, and as she followed their glances her eye rested on the straw-lettered words. There they stood, glistening and defying challenge.

“God giveth the *Increase*.”

Miss Euphemia leaned over to her sister—

“I say, Pam, how do *you* spell increase?”

The inquiry was equal to Peter's stage asides. It was audible in every corner, and all heads were turned towards the unfortunate text.

It is astonishing how small a matter kindleth a great fire. Before night fall every atom of jealousy in Slowford was in a blaze. There was no lack of fuel, and it all burned well. Those who had taken umbrage at Mrs. Huntley's “day;” those who objected to mixing the classes and seeing Mrs. Stuart chosen as her intimate; those who saw that Miss Sweeting was firmer than ever in her position of vicar; those who scented innovations, and, like the Webbs, had personal accounts to settle; those who objected to the observance of Saints' Days; those who liked nice

## Committed to his Charge

impersonal sermons, full of wisdom and with no application of nasty daily details, each and all declared against the Harvest Thanksgiving decorations.

Mrs. Kippan went home with exaggerated reports of gorgeous colouring, of grapes on the Communion Table, of something which she was sure was intended for a cross—"just as much of a one as they dast, but as if they dassent make it quite, more like a sawhorse"—of pictures hung from the gallery, of flowers in vases, just like at St. Michael's; and bad spelling, which indeed she wouldn't have believed the Rector guilty of if she hadn't seen it with her own eyes and been told by Miss Roper, who is a B.A., and a High School teacher, that increase *is* spelt with an s. "And what turns me most agin him," she concluded, "is the way he takes the c'lection and holds it up and fiddles with it, so Cath'lic like."

Mr. Kippan took down his book of Homilies and gathered his quadruple family about him. For an hour his coarse voice rose and fell, spelling out the most denunciatory portions he could find, bearing upon Ritual and Romanism and general badness. He gave a homily of his own, taking for text, "The accursed tree." It was

## Committed to his Charge

frightful to hear, as denunciation, invective, imprecation, rose and fell in that bright autumn air. His barns were full of grain; his famous meadow of half his farm had a last green upon it, and the cattle, his chief boast, roamed over its pleasant richness; there were stores of vegetables and fruit; the bins were yellow with corn, and from the rafters of his outside kitchen hung fitches of bacon and taut bags full of winter provision. The farm sloped on all sides from the gentle rise on which the house stood; close at hand was the medley of lowing and cackling, gobbling and barking, which is the noise of a country. Sunday afternoon. Nature wore a thankful face. But within doors the darkness of superstition and hereditary hate was striving to enfold a new generation.

Mrs. Mallory and her husband jogged home behind their Roman-nosed bay. They were in black for grandfather, that is to say Mrs. Mallory was, with the exception of a shawl in Victoria tartan. This garment made its appearance with regularity each autumn; not even Death could subdue it. Just now the *crêpe* from the wearer's veil overshadowed it at the back, but it shone out bravely above her black French merino skirt. Mr. Mallory's mourning consisted of a piece of

## Committed to his Charge

black round the crown of his cinnamon hat. Miss Mallory, on the small seat, was in all the bravery of a Thanksgiving suit, equal in gorgeousness to the decorations which they, with triple force, condemned.

In town the Rector and his wife pursued their quiet way, glad to see their wishes realized, taking pleasure in what they deemed success, and substituting an s for the mischievous c during the time intervening between morning service and Sunday School. The schoolhouse accommodation was insufficient and a Bible Class was held in the chancel, and they were loath to expose errors in the labours of their willing decorators to young critical eyes.

They little dreamed of the tempest brewing about them, although perhaps it did cross Tom Huntley's mind, as the offertory was being counted in the vestry, that Mr. Föryby commented on the smallness of the sum with a condemnatory note borrowed from his wife's voice.

It was a tiring day, and breakfast next morning at the Rectory was late. As they were sitting down Ann announced Mr. Low, the People's Warden.

## Committed to his Charge

Mr. Low had been a small storekeeper, when barter was the order of the day in Slowford, when every country store was an incipient Army and Navy. The Low emporium had held under its small roof all things necessary for village and country life, from groceries and seeds, farm hardware and implements, whisky and dress goods, to millinery and boots. The last hung on a string which ran overhead the length of the counter. There were tales extant of how, in the good old days before testers were known, Mr. Low's butter tubs had contained a layer of mashed potatoes below the butter; how his sugar was heavy in weight without a corresponding power of sweetness; and how his coffee mill had a bean and a chicory can beside it. His dry-goods were chosen with an understanding of his fair purchasers' requirements which did credit to him as a family man, and his ribbons and trimmings proclaimed him a Worth in disguise. Mrs. Low and her daughters had to content themselves with the gleanings of the shop, yet no better dressed women appeared in all Slowford. The family was successful on the co-operative plan; overalls and kindred garments were quietly made in the house, and it was not wonderful that money

## Committed to his Charge

was made, spent and saved, and Mr. Low able to retire.

But this period in the Low life had passed almost into legend now. A post under Government rewarded long and faithful service in the political field; and Mr. Low as turned from the hands of a city tailor, the master of Mrs. Low's well appointed house, was divorced from the pioneer small shopkeeper. Like many who had drifted into town life on the first opportunity, he had taken up land, and his happened to be in that locality where Mallory and Kippan held sway. Thus he became the exponent of country principles in the town, and was the mouthpiece when the country could not speak for itself. He taught in Sunday school, and irreverent boys called him Dismal John. Not that he was always dismal—he was of a convivial turn in secular matters, and kept his Puritanical face—as he kept his tall hat—for Sunday. He found his favourite amusement in games of cards, and he played well. There was neither Romanism nor schism in cards. His method of shuffling and sorting proclaimed him an accomplished player, and his cards seemed to find their places by some process of magic, different from the



## Committed to his Charge

eager, overtopping, awkward arrangement of less practised fingers. There was the same comparison as between the movements of a professional skater, when he makes his eight of elegance and curves and the well-meant but mis-directed right and left strokes of the amateur, who misdoubts his conventionalized eight and fears he may sit down in the middle of the extravaganza.

This morning, Monday though it was, the People's Warden wore his Sabbath mask.

The Rector was fond of a steak for breakfast, and a hot one steamed in the uncovered dish before him. But it was tough; one trial proved that, and laying down his fork he pushed aside the books just used for morning prayer.

"Good morning, Low; just in time for a cup of coffee; I know you are early people at your house. You behold me a martyr going to the steak." He gave it another prod. "Tell you what, Helen, we shall have to change our butcher."

Mr. Low looked still more grave. Puns were undignified in a clergyman, and he objected to the word "martyr," it savoured of Romanism. "Thank you," he said stiffly, accepted the cup

## Committed to his Charge

from Helen's hand, and lapsed into silence. The Rector looked at him inquiringly, and Helen's fingers were nervous as she cut up Marjorie's breakfast.

"I came thus early," began the Warden at last, "that I might possibly arrest behaviour which would be distressing to you, and which might hinder your good work in this place hereafter. *Personally* I have no objection to this Harvest Thanksgiving, none whatever."

"Come now, Low, that's quite liberal!" The Rector began with intention to be good humoured, if a trifle sarcastic, but temper rose. "No personal objection to thankfulness to Almighty God for all his benefits? Upon my word, Low, you are getting positively broad."

The Rector laughed, not a pleasant laugh, and he saw that there was mischief. The Warden's look and tone were full of it. Helen's colour rose, and she made haste to get the children finished with and sent off. The little ones sat, fork in hand, eyeing the stranger, refusing to hurry and dimly conscious that papa was getting queer.

"No, Mr. Huntley; I repeat that, *personally*, I have no objection. But there are many who

## Committed to his Charge

do object, sir, and yesterday's—" he was about to say "exhibition," but substituted "services"— "yesterday's services have given umbrage in certain quarters. Mr. Kippan is in town now; in fact has driven in on purpose."

"Ah, Kippan; has he, indeed!"

"Yes, and Mr. Mallory, and several others living in the same vicinity. This place, as you well understand, sir, is Protestant; yes, *broadly* Protestant, sir."

"Narrowly Protestant," retorted the Rector.

"And the majority of our people are old or elderly." Mr. Low ignored the interruption. "And have grown up under our late dear Pastor's guidance. For forty years he occupied that pulpit. Naturally, we look to the memory of what—that which—he taught us as much—more—er—in fact, as to yourself, Mr. Huntley."

He paused; the Rector remained silent. When the late Rector's name was mentioned there was nothing for him to say.

"What we—er—they—object to is having these decorations at all. We are a thankful community—I hope you are not under any misapprehension in that direction; but we

## Committed to his Charge

worship in spirit and in truth. We have never been accustomed to anything but greens at Christmas.

"Ah!" murmured the Rector.

"These vases on the table are something we can never permit. Never! The Church would be empty—and the offertory plate, too, if they remained."

"Where did you get your authority for your greens, I wonder. Well, Mr. Low, is there anything else?"

"Yes, yes. The text or scrolls; and they tell me there is some bad spelling too."

The Rector roared. He laughed until he had to wipe his eyes. Mr. Low looked furious.

"Well, that was un-Rubrical—I admit that," and Huntley laughed again.

"That is a matter of no importance whatever." Mr. Low waved his hand, in broad-minded admission that one might spell badly and still be a good Protestant. "As for the bread and the vegetables, sir, we think they are unseemly. The fact is they must be removed, sir, or trouble will follow."

"Will you kindly tell me," said the Rector, pushing away his plate of refractory steak, "the

## Committed to his Charge

names of those opposed to the decorations, and of those, if there are any, who approve?"

"Well, the five or six farmers of the Arm, and all their relatives in town. You know them all; the Lewises, Tom Kippan, a number of people at the Works, and Neil the blacksmith. Upon my word, I thought Neil would have gone in with his hammer yesterday and laid about him. Then there are Lucy and several others who don't care a pin either way. Those in favour are those who did the work, Mrs. Stuart, Miss Sweeting, Mrs. Lindsay and all that lot. Mrs. Forby I'm not sure of. Forby himself doesn't mind, nor the Bankers, nor Dr. Langtry."

"Very good of them, I'm sure; but I think the decorations had better remain up till the wardens and myself order them down." He drained the last drop of his coffee and rose. "From what you say, I conclude that those who do object—and I put you in the number, in spite of your protest of no personal objection—are those who, in this or any other work accomplished since my arrival here, have not done one stroke of it. As to the criticisms, a true critic dwells rather on excellence than on imperfections; he finds concealed beauties, and shows to

## Committed to his Charge

others that which is best worth observing. If a "c" has been put in for an "s" I am sorry ; but it is scarcely a mistake beyond faulty spelling. The ladies who did that work were at it at one o'clock in the morning. If those who were then asleep in their beds had helped earlier in the evening this small error would not have occurred through over-fatigue."

"This is all very well, Mr. Huntley, but the people who did the work were small in number because so few sympathized in it. The women have always had things pretty much their own way in the Church, but the men will express an opinion now and then."

"I am perfectly willing they shall, after they have earned the right by being workers."

"I think you forget that they do the active work of giving pecuniary support—giving their money, Mr. Huntley. And when they give it they naturally wish for a voice in the spending of it. Not often ; just now and then."

"No, they don't," returned the Rector hotly. "The money would remain in their pockets for ever if not taken out by their wives and daughters. Do you mean to tell me that the thirty-six women workers of that Guild are not the real givers?"

## Committed to his Charge

Some natures are based upon a profound selfishness. Mr. Low could not contemplate space without some tacit recognition of the point in it occupied by himself. He stood up and buttoned his coat.

"I see we shall never come to an understanding, Mr. Huntley. I only warn you once again the decorations must come down, and that it is more dignified to *order* their removal than that it should be done forcibly."

There was no gainsaying this. The Rector took his hat and stick and without further ado followed the warden through the church grounds. As they passed Kippan's Island Huntley laughed.

"How you can all be led by such a man as that, I can't conceive."

Mr. Low's aquiline member quivered. "Some allowance must be made for age and prejudice," he said stiffly, stalking over the flat gravestones, where the first hard snow was beginning to lodge.

"For age, surely," replied the Rector, whose mind was still heated, "but not for prejudice beyond a certain amount."

They heard the hum of voices inside the

## Committed to his Charge

church, then the slamming of doors and an after stillness. When they entered, Peter was in possession, wielding his broom with all his might, right and left down the centre aisle, where a mess, much the same as that of Saturday night, was waiting for him.

Not a trace of decoration was to be seen in place anywhere. The straw-plait letters lay in a heap, the stooks of oats and wheat and barley with their blue ribbons looked like dishevelled wigs; vegetables were piled in one corner; the bread was one heap of debris, and the grapes gave evidence of having been eaten, for skins and stems lay about, and the remains of bunches had been thrown on top of the straw letters. The wreaths were off the gallery pillars, and where Mrs. Stuart's scroll had hung the nails still held patches left from the quick wrench which had taken it down. It evidently had been torn from below.

"It be burnt," said Peter in an awe-struck voice, following their gaze to the gallery. He had left off sweeping and stood, broom in hand, noting the Rector's blazing eyes as they travelled from gallery to chancel and back again. Mr. Low's equanimity was put to a severe test. He



## Committed to his Charge

stood, performing dry ablutions with his hands and trying to moisten his lips with a dry and pointed tongue. His lips shook. He had been cowed by the country people ; now he recognised there were more things than one to fear, and he stood between the devil and the deep sea, the parish and the Rector, vowing mentally to be warden never more.

Peter's attempt at explanation brought forth no response. Mr. Low was physically incapable, and the Rector was not in a talking humour. The latter took in every detail, and then turned to the sexton.

"Go on with your work. You can take the vegetables to the House of Refuge. I will wish you good-morning, Mr. Low ; you may hear from me later in the day," and with this comforting prospect Mr. Low remained behind. The Rector strode out of the Church, past Kippan's Island, across the narrow street and down his own stone steps—for the Rectory ground began where the ground suddenly dipped—opened his door, and went to his study.

That day left one of the few dark memories of Helen's life. Her husband told the story, and they took counsel together. Should they leave

## Committed to his Charge

or should they stay—that was the question to debate. He wavered between two opinions, and with her the wish to go was balanced by the conviction that it was their duty to remain.

“Why not give it up, Tom?” she said at last, wearied and heart-sick. “If we stay for a thousand years we can never agree. They have droned on in the old way for so long that they have no wish to get out of it. If we were missionaries among real savages——”

“Real enough,” said Tom.

“And then those Bankers and people who would like things just a little different are looked upon with suspicion, just as we ourselves are, because they are strangers. As for the Lucys——”

“Oh, confound the Lucys!”

“Tom, dear—don’t! I know they are most provoking. You know we *need* not stay here; nor, indeed, anywhere we don’t like. And yet, Tom, when we have these chances, isn’t it all the more reason to persevere here? Just *because* we can afford to.”

Tom’s gloomy brow grew blacker and blacker.

“Then let us go, dear; only, please, don’t look like that.”

## Committed to his Charge

"Never!" he cried, ramming both hands deep in his pockets. "I'd die first! Leave and be beaten by these barbarous savages——"

"Well, Tom dear," and one of the hands was pulled and assisted, not unwillingly, about her waist, "then let us stay. But we must make the best of it, not the worst of it. Oh, dear! It will want an awful lot of patience."

"More than I've got, I'm afraid."

"Whatever will be done about Mrs. Stuart's scroll?"

"Nothing; let her abide by the acts of her townspeople. I don't know whether to knock them all into a cocked hat next Sunday, or not say anything."

"I think silence would be best," she answered after a moment's thought; "because, you see, if you preached at them it would bring out answers, letters in the papers perhaps. If you are silent no one can make you speak, and they will be only too thankful to be let alone."

"But I told Low he might hear from me later in the day!" and Tom laughed. "I haven't the faintest idea what I meant my threat to convey."

## Committed to his Charge

"If you looked as you did when you came in, it could have been nothing less than knives and pistols. I think he has been frightened enough for one day; *he* won't find any fault with you for not keeping your word. It does give one a vision of packing-cases, and cabs and a train, doesn't it?" and she looked regretfully at all the pretty luxury about them. "And only just settled too; new carpets, and everything!"

"Besides the risk to the pink china from another move." He sat down to the piano, and his big hands drifted into Tosti's song, "*It came with the merry May, love—*'

His voice was rich, with that touch of regret in it which is the link 'twixt song and heart. Then the regret turned to a laugh, and the melody went on:—

*"And went with the Michaelmas goose."*

Helen's humour was steadier.

"Oh, we must make a new trial. And Tom, dear, would you mind awfully if I said something to you?"

"I generally do *mind* anything you choose to say to me. I put up pretty well with you."

"Put up with! Hark to him!"

## Committed to his Charge

"Forgive me, dear; I'm a brute. I know it. I acknowledge it. Well, what is it?"

"Just this, dear," and she laid hold of the lapel of his coat, looking him steadily in the eye. "You know you do sit on people at times. You needn't wriggle. And in your sermons too. You have preached several like the one you gave the boys after the three-card-monte was found out in the fifth form. Well, you know, dear, these people are not schoolboys."

"I wish they were anything half as decent. I begin to sympathize with Mrs. Macaffrey about the cat. I believe that if a yellow cat were to appear at that door——"

"Oh, don't!" said Helen.

He took her hands.

"I give in. I know; I have been like that many a time in my sermons, and would have liked a cane to back my words. Well, we will try."

## CHAPTER XI

### VICTORY

THE first storms of the early winter came during that week. There was every excuse that visits should not be made or received, and on Wednesday the Rectory door-bell was not rung.

On the Sunday which followed Thanksgiving Day the congregation was larger than usual. Some members looked excited, some shame-faced, all expectant. But the only thing to gratify them was the sight of Helen in her furs. No furs like them, for size or richness, had ever been seen in Slowford, and even Mrs. Lucy in comparison looked shabby and old-fashioned. They recognised now that Helen was likely to give them periodical shocks in the matter of dress; no doubt the spring would bring out something to make them forget both furs and pink bonnet.

Peter was more nervous than usual; a dog found its way into church and had to be expelled, other distressing things occurred, but nothing

## Committed to his Charge

worthy of note came from the Rector. His text was "Our Father who art in Heaven," and the sermon breathed forth charity to all mankind, the belief in universal brotherhood.

"I never was so disappointed in my life," said Mrs. Forby. "I never knew a Rector take a position like that before."

"Good God, Maria!" said Mr. Forby, laying down his carvers, "what do you suppose men are made of? What position would the old Rector have taken, may I ask?"

"Under the bed, most likely," was Maria's prompt response, as she warmed a spoon in the mashed potatoes.

"I believe you think in your heart that is where all men ought to be." Mr. Forby renewed his attack upon the beef. "You don't come out plump and plain like Mrs. Lindsay; but, Lord! you look a lot sometimes."

The people in the country were priding themselves upon a victory gained.

"We just up and said we wouldn't have it," said Mrs. Mallory. "Nice people they are, both on 'em: but our religion ought to come afore everything." She piously folded her hands, and called upon Mary to bring out the Family Bible

## Committed to his Charge

for the afternoon reading. "Find Sisera, and Dathan and Abiram, and Jezebel, and Dan'l in the den, Mary. I didn't take much to the sermon this forenoon. There wasn't much food or powerful scripture to it."

Mrs. Stuart, in her little cottage, sat beside her bright fire, book in hand, Alec on the opposite side with his. The boy had been incensed at the maltreatment of his mother's scroll, and was bitterly disappointed that Sunday morning had brought no castigation from the pulpit. As she read, she looked up from time to time to watch the face she loved best.

"What is it, Alec? A penny for your thoughts."

"Don't waste your pennies, mother. I was just thinking it was rather small of Mr. Huntley not going for those people this morning. I thought he was a manly fellow. If I was as big as that——"

"Manliness is neither in size nor in quick retort. If Mr. Huntley had done as you would have liked—or as I should have liked, at first," she added honestly, "he would have had to use some of the weapons he was attacked with, and then you and I should not have been able to



## Committed to his Charge

think of him as we do in our hearts to-day. And there would have been dispeace."

"Peace!" said Alec contemptuously. "I wouldn't give a fig for all the peace in the world, bought at that price. Jimminy! I believe if I had biceps like him I'd have knocked out both the wardens, and pummelled old Kippan into a red-headed rag mat. It's a beastly shame about that scroll!"

"The scroll went in good service. A better state of things is bound to come about some day, but the overturn is not made in an hour. Somebody has to suffer in every beginning."

"Well, now, mother, what do you think of the Orangemen—honestly, in your heart?"

"Just the same as I did before they tore my scroll." And then Mrs. Stuart put down her own book, and together they looked up authorities on the Orange body. She acknowledged some of its virtues as originally intended and had an uncomfortable faculty for seeing the second side of a question; she would not allow herself to be governed by opinion brought about through personal experience.

Mrs. Lindsay felt that the less she said the better. When it come to a mistake in spelling

## Committed to his Charge

between her and Miss Sweeting, she knew what verdict would be pronounced; besides which, the second half of the text had been her share. Her rule had always been to make the most of everything presumably creditable, and to ignore anything else. She had been honest with Miss Sweeting, as they were partners in crime.

"I never was so non-pulsed in my life," she confessed at their first meeting after that dreadful Sunday. "When I looked down at the Delabaughs' pew they were all in paryoxiams of laughter. When I seen the cause of it you might have knocked me down with a feather."

On this Sunday afternoon her eyes were on her book, but her thoughts were elsewhere. She dreaded to meet Mrs. Forby and the Guild; and to-morrow was the date for the next meeting, when they would have to be faced.

Her son Jim, sitting near by, was reading not much more attentively. "My! but I wish I had spoken, cold and late as it was. Not that it would have made a bit of difference; they were in for a rumpus anyway. Some of those people are ripe for a row any time. But it's unpleasant having started in this way; I don't like mother having the credit of it. But I blacked young

## Committed to his Charge

Neil's eye for his gibes—I've got that much out of it. I'm pretty thankful that afterwards I kept it to myself I'd seen the mistake that night. But it was so darned cold. I believe mother would kill me if she knew." His eyes wandered across to where Mrs. Lindsay sat. "I believe she feels real bad. I wish I *had* told."

Miss Sweeting hurried home from her Sunday-school class, without stopping to exchange greetings with Mrs. Lindsay or any of her fellow-teachers. She said to herself it was too cold. As a rule she was the centre of an admiring crowd of younger women, for she had such success with her pupils, and stood so high in the estimation of Rector and superintendent that to minds unclouded by jealousy she was a typical teacher, worthy of all admiration and a model to copy. Once home in her own room at the Lucys, her poor eyes were red with weeping. It was impossible for her not to be in accord with a Rector, and the sermon that morning had intensified this particular devotion. And the strain of the struggle told deeply in her. Her association with the clergy and parish work had been close and long; the successes, though many, were few in comparison when ill-feelings of many descrip-

## Committed to his Charge

tions came to the top, and she had hoped much from the advent of this man. Hitherto she had looked upon the dependence of the clergyman as reason for much that went wrong; but here was a man of independent means, and things promised to be worse than ever. She had passed the week in a twitter of fear that his resignation would be sent in; and, indeed, many said he could not do otherwise, if he had the heart of even a mouse. She knew Mrs. Forby's opinion.

"It is always the way with these big men," said that lady, glancing over Mr. Forby's ample proportions; "big outside, little inside."

"I don't agree with you, Maria," replied her husband; "I think he is a good fellow, and unless he intends to turn things quite upside down I mean to stick by him. after this, as long as I am warden." Which he did.

This conversation took place before Miss Sweeting and she felt that, although she had never before cared for Mr. Forby, he was now *her* friend.

When the Huntleys proposed their harvest decorations they meant well and hoped for great results. To them the trial ended in complete failure; the Kippans and Mallorys looked upon

## Committed to his Charge

it as their own triumph. But from it came results that neither side could foresee, an amount of success which the Rector and his wife scarcely dared hope for before that dramatic Sunday.

Mr. Forby was as good as his word ; he even went to church on the following Ash Wednesday, although he had been one of those who would not have part or lot in the Communion Service. The old Rector never heeded the defection of the men on that day, and it was so common for him to have to preach to rows of bonnets only that a few men the less made no impression on him. With Tom Huntley it was different, and, forewarned of the antagonism, he took steps to meet it by giving a course of sermons before Lent on that season and on other undiscussed subjects. The result was that on Ash Wednesday the few men who had gone to Church on that day in previous years were now absent. They had been the apathetic ones, led there by their wives ; but they turned active now, when Mr. Low and other lights, who felt such sermons to be a reflection on themselves, said that the service was good enough for a parcel of ignorant women—gentle creatures, whose curses were neither here nor there—and decided to remain away. Therefore

## Committed to his Charge

Mr. Forby's presence created commotion ; he had never been seen there before on Ash Wednesday, and this time he was the only man in the Church. Hitherto his advances to the Rector had been of a shy, half-sheepish character and not quite understood by the recipient, but this action served for the point at which they met and understood each other. From that day the Rector did not feel friendless.

The Guild remained active as ever and more sympathetic with the Rector's views, and it was not long before Mrs. Lindsay and Mrs. Stuart were joined by their sons in Church work. Nor did the Rector so often, as Mrs. Forby put it, "begin his canvass by cantering over their corns." A day actually came, and before midsummer too, when Mr. Low was not the sole male teacher in the Sunday School.

It was natural that a friendship should begin between the Rector and his warden after the latter's active support on Ash Wednesday, and the act, with the amount of moral courage necessary to perform it, was quite appreciated. Change of doctrine and heart, and many other changes which appear and are great, are as nothing to the power which enables them to make any visible

## Committed to his Charge

sign in the details of daily life. Mr. Forby found that he was much more impressed by what he saw and heard at the Rectory than he was by anything in the way of Church services. The Huntleys appeared at all the social gatherings that winter and spring, even in circles outside the Church set, and they did their share in return; but in addition to seeing them thus, Mr. Forby was a constant informal visitor at the Rectory, where he made, a third in the cosy study. He would often leave it, with his hat over his eyebrows, wishing that "Maria were different," and he resolved to be different himself.

But Mr. Forby found it was easier to resolve than to act. When Mr. and Mrs. Forby took their walks abroad it was their custom to keep several paces apart, she in the rear. It could not have been for the sake of each other's society they went, for they seldom exchanged a thought; they confined themselves to short sentences necessary to the expedition in hand. Sometimes it looked like a saunter, at others it was merely the necessity of getting from place to place; but it never had the appearance of being pleasure. At whist parties and other gatherings, where gallantry took the form of supplying the

## Committed to his Charge

fair with supper, it never entered Mr. Forby's head, any more than it did the heads of all the other men in Slowford, to minister to the wants of the one he was supposed to love best. In that town the code of manners decreed that he should be attentive to some other man's wife—in an innocent way, it is true—with spiced beef and calf's-foot jelly and coffee for topics. It was a shock to Society when it found that Tom Huntley had an eye to his own wife, while quite as polite as anyone else to the wives of others. She liked her supper, did that rather delicate looking woman, and other eyes were sometimes envious of the well-chosen plates presented to her by the man who best knew her tastes. Slowford believed in comforting the inner man, and a husband of this kind was like the discovery of a new vein of gold.

"Small blame to her being able to enjoy her supper," said Mrs. Lindsay; "we could all do the same if we sat still and could bleat 'Tom'!—and had a Tom."

In the manner of address there were peculiarities, and some married couples all but ignored each other. Mr. and Mrs. Forby were more active. She was often snappish, and he had an



## Committed to his Charge

unpleasant way of addressing her as if she were not quite a fool; at other times he talked at her.

On one occasion, when going-home time came, a greater surprise than Helen's supper awaited them. Tom anxiously asked his wife as to goloshes; and while the wondering natives stood about to find out why he was chatting in Greek, amazement followed curiosity. For down on his clerical knees did he go, and put them on her himself. He gave each shapely foot a pat of proprietary approval—"There, dearie, goloshes and Slowford are inseparable in my mind!"

"Goloshes!" said Mrs. Lindsay, surveying the broad black back, and the serene face of the pampered wife which rose above it; "'losh, 'losh? What does it rhyme with—Oh, I know—sounds profane from a clergyman, don't you think?"

"Italian, eh?" said Mrs. Forby maliciously. "Has a sound of a soft 's,' you know." Everybody laughed. The company was hilarious that night, which Mrs. Lindsay explained by alluding to a suspicion of Walker's in the trifle.

By now the Rectory pair faced them and inarticulate criticisms—

## Committed to his Charge

"!"

"!!!"

"?"

"They're awfully odd," said Helen, as her husband tucked her hand within his arm.

"Or we," answered the moralising Tom. "Ten to one that is what they think of us."

Which was true. For from the members of the disjointed couples who plaintively—or abusively, according to temperament and sex—wondered why on earth he—or she—did not come on, or what the blank-blank made her (always her) think he was going to stand all night in water up to his knees while she got her own umbrella up, came remarks now articulate.

"Here, dearie," said one, light-hearted wife to her mired spouse; and he, laughing, awkwardly put her hand within his unaccustomed arm. For, after all, there was something comfortable about it, and it was so dark—thank Heaven—that neither Mrs. Forby nor Mrs. Lindsay could see his foolishness.

"Why, he speaks to her just as if she was not his wife at all!" and this wife's words gave an unpleasant twinge to her husband.

It was upon these things, and others like

## Committed to his Charge

unto them evolved by the Huntley *regime*, that Mr. Forby would ponder as he took his homeward way.

Soon Helen appeared in a spring bonnet which buried the memories of the pink one and the furs for ever; a most daring bonnet for a clergywoman to wear. But she wore it, and was as pretty and unconscious as ever. In the course of the succeeding year she came into more money, and spent a goodly portion of it immediately. Packing-cases and crates full of prettinesses arrived from afar for the Rectory, and soon the enormity of keeping two maids and a washerwoman was forgotten in excitement over the institution of a carriage. The latter was a very modest affair, but, to an initiated eye, correct, with two brilliant little lamps in front and ample accommodation for her large family in its roomy dimensions. She drove her gentle but handsome ponies herself. It was not the Slowford idea of a clerical coach, but it so often gave lifts to tired people, and so many friends and invalids were given airings in it, that it became more popular than the high buggy and sleepy Rosinante, sacred to clerical use in days gone by, could ever have become. It often stood

## Committed to his Charge

in front of the hospital or wherever there was want or pain, and gentle words and graceful actions, warm clothing, cooling drinks and food for hungry little mouths, soon became associated with the sight of it. The first winter had proved severe past common, and Tom Huntley found suffering enough and to spare. He strode about in his Inverness cape, his dogs at his heels, and discovered cases with positive delight.

"It seems a dreadful thing to say," said Helen in the Guild room, "but I really think he *enjoyed* finding those three poor little children huddled on top of the stove. It gave him wood to get and chop, and the fire to make, and by the time Peter got there with the parcels no one would have known that shanty on the common. Oh yes, he did enjoy it."

Certainly, his popularity went up with a bound in those dark winter days, and his large way of giving charity, without asking questions, made great impression.

"Did that family belong to *us*?" asked Mrs. Lindsay in the Guild; "I never heard the name before."

"Do you suppose Tom would stop to ask if they were Anglicans!"

## Committed to his Charge

The Guild did not like the term Anglican, and the members made their meaning plain to Helen. A discussion ensued on the over-vexed question of High and Low.

"Oh, but you misunderstand me," she pleaded with rising colour. "Neither do I like *really real* High Churchism—all copes and celibates and things, you know—I don't indeed."

This ended the matter, and for a good reason. As Mrs. Forby and Mrs. Lindsay sat at their work that evening, with Mr. Forby, in the chair from which he carved, absorbed in his paper, the two ladies discussed copes and celibates.

"Cope sounds straight enough, but the other I misdoubt is Italian. In that case, you know, the 'c' would be soft, so it would naturally be pronounced shelibate—or perhaps tcshelibate. Now you'd think Mrs. Huntley would know all that; wouldn't you? What do you think?"

"I don't *know* anything whatever about it," said Mrs. Forby, "so I don't *think*. I steer clear of it."

Mrs. Lindsay appealed to Mr. Forby.

"What does it mean?" he said, dreamily repeating her Italianized word. "Oh, something geological, fossil of some sort." Then he waked

## Committed to his Charge

up. "Trilobite," he added promptly, as became the Chairman of the Slowford High School Board.

Mrs. Forby explored the recesses of the sideboard for biscuits and home-made wine, remarking as she did so, "There's a dictionary at your elbow all the time; why don't you look in it?"

Mrs. Lindsay did.

"Lord save us! It's a bachelor!"

Mr. Forby looked over her shoulder, as her index finger rested on the word.

"Why couldn't you say so?" he asked; "'c' is 'c' all the world over—not that I was so very far out," he added, reseating himself.

Matters, generally, went on in their allotted routine, and the organ's turn came. It got its overhauling, much to Peter's distress, and the makers and tuners took his beloved instrument to pieces. Peter disbelieved their power to reconstruct her. He had a small disciple in the box to blow, while the man at the board kept up a running fire of direction and invective aimed at his assistants aloft who, candle in hand, moved through the dirty darkness with the necessary tools.

"What be the matter with her, anyway?"

## Committed to his Charge

asked Peter, listening to the groans and shrieks elicited as the pitch was raised or lowered. "She be groanin' powerful, and no mistake about that. Her be bad."

The man halloed something concerning a new tracker and the pedal-board.

"Stop blowing—stop that infernal noise, I say! I must mend this running."

The last sounds left from the vigorous over-blowing died out in a collapsing agony as Peter viewed the confusion in the Chancel.

"She wants a new stummick, belike. Good Lord! Listen to that! She be dead, zure."

But it was a new life, such as the organ and its hearers had never known. It was not long before series of recitals were given, and Carney was not above taking hints; moreover, the Rector treated him to a few lessons which fell in his way by a happy chance. Themes with variations by Grobe were heard no more, hymns were sung without solos, and Jackson was buried.

But what of Miss Sweeting throughout this time? Faithful, industrious, demure as ever, pausing now and then to pay off some long-

## Committed to his Charge

standing score where the Rector's ignorance and a sense of her own usefulness enabled her to give her small blow with telling effect, she made herself as indispensable to Helen as to Helen's husband. If he did sometimes pull down, she could show him how to be reconstructive when he found he had got things in a mess. It must be acknowledged that the Rector often had need to feel as he felt once as a boy, after dismembering a clock that had to be put together again before discovery should be upon him. The despair which was then his, as he stood before the confusion of wheels and springs and brass and wooden parts, now often came back to him when too much zeal made him take away the old before his plans were matured for founding the new. But it was, on the whole, a full and happy period, and he felt Slowford, with the Slowford Church, to be his life-work.



## CHAPTER XII

### THE FATAL KISS

THERE was a new baby at the Rectory the second winter of the Huntley incumbency. It was now three months old, but Helen still kept her room of a morning. Ann prepared her breakfast and Tom took it up. The last was almost too much for Mrs. Forby. Carriage, furs, pink bonnet were as nothing to the breakfast. In her eyes Tom was as much unsexed by the part he took with the tray as Mrs. Lindsay was when she upheld the voting of women.

This baby was like all the others, promising to have eyes and complexion like its mother, but with some of those wonderful developments in likeness decipherable by feminine eyes only. The Rector stood in the doorway of Helen's room this February morning, the silver tray, with its couple of covered dishes and cosied teapot, in his hand.

"May I ask, Mrs. Huntley, if you are aware that the infant lying there is three months old

## Committed to his Charge

to-day? Are we ever to have the pleasure of your society at breakfast again?" He handed her a small mirror. "Look at that, will you! I think you will see there reflected a young mother in the very best condition."

"Not a young mother now, Tom, any way you look at it." Her eye rested fondly on the bundle near her, then she uncovered a dish and poured herself a cup of tea. "Take this cover, will you, dear? Remember, she is Number Five. I have been seriously thinking of a governess. Somebody of Miss Sweeting's type—oh, *not* her, of course, but some one like her in *some* ways. Well, we'll see. I suppose there is no hurry. Four girls, think of that!"

"When you do come down you might give an eye to Punch. He doesn't look well—in spite of having saluted me at the close of prayers yesterday with a baked potato on the back of my head. Oh, only cold, I fancy. He did not eat his breakfast—no, lie still. He is all right, and the two of them are looking from the study window at the snow plough passing. There are two horses on it this morning; the drifts are tremendous, and there is every indication of a long storm coming up."

## Committed to his Charge

In the face of such prognostications Mrs. Huntley looked to be in the best possible case, and she seemed to realize it. Her face expressed unalloyed contentment.

"I'll tell you what, Tom—drop in and tell Miss Sweeting to bring over her work and stay to lunch. I have come to a deadlock in that frontal. She is so clever in making out things."

A frontal! And it was destined for All Saints, Slowford!

Punch and Judy stood at the study window, watching the performance going on in the street. Great flakes were in the air now, scurrying everywhere, and again coming down with a gentle persistence. Big snow wreaths and drifts blocked up the sloping corner, where all the efforts of horses and men were concentrated. The former were good-hearted, stout beasts, bending with a will to the task, with a man astride of the leader; behind the plough was another man to guide it, his shouts and directions half lost in the swirl and howl. On either side, as they slowly left a wake, rose a compact, glittering wall, several feet in height; an occasional gleam of sun between the flurries lit

## Committed to his Charge

up the scene as if by a lime-light. The men were muffled, the horses blanketed, and in the cosy warmth of the study it was hard to realize that several degrees below zero made such covering needful. Judy shouted at the ploughing of the horses, the overturn of the plough and the ripping of it through the white mass when righted. But Punch looked on in a half-hearted way, seeing but not observing. His small head ached, and his eyelids drooped. His mother's toilet and the baby's took time, and it was eleven o'clock when the two important people made their appearance. Helen put the baby in a mass of lace and ribbon which she called a bassinette and which Mrs. Forby never missed an opportunity of calling a cradle—with three "k's" at the beginning of the word.

"Come here, darling," said Helen, holding out her hand to Punch; but he hardly noticed tone or action. She called Ann, and there was a hurried consultation.

"Get a spoon," she ordered, and the horrors of a spoon woke the child. He manifested his objection by kicking Ann's shins.

"Very well," said his mother, trying to be severe, but knowing that her voice was shaking ;

## Committed to his Charge

she did not like his look, nor the fevered touch of his fingers. "Very well; we will wait until papa comes, and you know what *that* means."

The threat did not seem to convey any very terrible idea to Punch's mind. His excitement was spent and the apathy returned. He refused to rejoin Judy at the window, and lay in a heap across an arm-chair.

"I wouldn't fret, ma'am. He's just taken cold. The doctor? Oh well, of course; it's always safest where there's childer."

Ann was despatched for Peter, and Helen called after her, "to tell him to bring home oranges and lemons with him—he's sure to be thirsty. Are you thirsty, darling? Does your head hurt?"

But Punch was not inclined for talk, and only vouchsafed that "he ached," the term being applied generally and not particularly. He was still heaped in the chair when Miss Sweeting arrived, and they let him alone. It was weary waiting for the doctor, as Helen watched her child from her place at the luncheon table, giving many glances towards the window.

"Do you think he is *really* very ill?" But Miss Sweeting could not tell. Helen turned to

## Committed to his Charge

the chair and lifted the light shawl thrown over him. "Punch, darling—oh, do come—it is not sleep! Punch, wake up—Ann, Ann——" For Master Punch was insensible.

Again was Peter sent, this time for the Rector, and for any doctor he might be able to get. Their own medical man came in the middle of the commotion, and by the time Tom Huntley reached them there was panic over the word "diphtheria." In less time than it can be told that happy family party was broken up for ever, the members scattered, never, alas, to be together again.

One startling order from the doctor succeeded another—a nurse from the hospital, Punch to be quarantined, the baby to be removed, or else mother and babe to leave at once, the other children to be sent somewhere, anywhere, and all as quickly as might be. Miss Sweeting stood by, quietly crying as she listened to Helen's ejaculations and changing resolves; one moment the baby could and should not be sent away, in the next she should be, and at once, as his mother must stay by Punch.

"If baby has to go, let *me* have her," said Miss Sweeting, emerging from behind her handker-

## Committed to his Charge

chief when there was something for her to do. "I'm sure Mrs. Lucy won't object. Oh, *do*."

By this time Tom had made arrangements, very liberal ones, with Mrs. Stuart to receive the three little girls; her own boy was to be sent away, and with Ann she was not afraid to undertake the charge. Baby had never yet been out; but an astonishing suit of embroidered flannel awaited that event, and very sweet she looked in her white fur bonnet. It was a sad introduction to the world.

Presently two cabs were leaving the gateway; in one went Miss Sweeting, Mrs. Lucy and the new baby; in the other sat Ann with Judy, Tommy and Pinkie. Ann cried, and so did Judy from sympathy, not knowing why. From house to cab ran the Rector with valises and parcels, hard lines in his face and his hair ruffled in the wind, oblivious of the biting cold and the lack of cap or gloves. At the study window stood Helen, for a moment forgetting the child upstairs, in the agony of thought conjured up by the procession making ready outside. There were no sounds, but she could see Judy's small, miserable face pressed close to the pane, trying for another glimpse. She could see Mrs. Lucy

## Committed to his Charge

bending over the fluffy white bundle in Miss Sweeting's lap; then Tom's gestures indicated that all was ready and a start might be made. In the moment that the nurse upstairs heard Helen's cry she thought it was from some animal in mortal pain. It was the cry of motherhood bereft of its young, the same in all degrees of life, as universal as life itself. Helen darted through the doorway, up the stone steps, to where the cabmen stood by the doors. They knew, and opened to her.

First the baby. It was in her arms, and there was a sound like to the crooning that had for long been such music to Tom Huntley's ears; but there was a harsh note in it, new and terrible.

"Me too, mother!" cried Judy, leaning out from her seat. There were dry sobs and more embraces, the carriages drove off, and her husband hurried her in, neither quite conscious of what had happened. It was one big misery. For a moment they stood in the silent hall, full of unwonted disorder; then a sound from above brought back full consciousness. Helen started, but Tom's strong arms caught her. She lay for a moment, then her eyes filled, her heart-beats quickened, and nature had its way.



## Committed to his Charge

"Let me go," she said, struggling for freedom and putting her determination to be calm in force; "I must go to Punch."

This was on Thursday; by Saturday night there was no hope. The warning on the hall door advised all to beware, and kind inquirers remained at a respectful distance. Peter was faithful in behalf of his master and mistress, seconding Mary's efforts.

"Go to the back door, or the side door, if ye be afraid of the ticket," was his advice, for to him the chief danger lay in that mysterious placard.

A clergyman from a neighbouring parish took the Sunday's duty, and before the morning service opened there were many conjectures exchanged as to how things might be at the Rectory. The wildest rumours were abroad, that both parents "had it," and that the children with Mrs. Stuart were attacked. It was true that the one case was of the most virulent kind, and there was excuse for fear and caution. As the prayer for all sorts and conditions of men was begun, heads were bowed still lower; but faces presently loomed over the prayer desks at an unwonted departure—"especially for Eustace,

## Committed to his Charge

only and beloved son of Helen and Thomas Huntley."

The boy battled for life ; remedies only applied in extremity were used, the week dragged through, and on the next Sunday thanks were returned by Thomas and Helen Huntley for the life of their son.

All this time with the briefest intervals for her rest, this big child had remained on his mother's knee. The nurse and doctor expostulated, her husband commanded ; she might give him up for an hour, but soon her arms encircled him again. She obeyed the warning not to kiss him, until the Saturday night when she was told that her prayers were answered. Then she yielded in ecstasy what she had withstood in despair, kissing him not once but many times. Then, free to rest, she gave him up, to be herself attacked in the reaction by all the preliminary symptoms. Her whole frame was full of the poison she had been imbibing night and day, and soon they had to send Tom Huntley away from the sight and sound of the suffering she was called upon to endure, while she panted out her life in the room where she had finished her watch over her son, thirty-six hours before.

## Committed to his Charge

Early on Monday evening Huntley found himself standing beside her ; at least they said it was Helen, his lovely Helen, that loathsome sight. She could not articulate, but she was conscious ; her efforts were interpreted as "children"—"good-bye," and it was over. She was out of pain ; and he afterwards remembered having sensation enough left in him to be thankful for that.

The blizzard foretold had surely come ; winter was one wild rage ; Slowford was snowbound, without mail or train, market or school.

In the Rectory there was need of haste. Tom saw people, the doctor and the nurse, but a moment after that troubled speaking, wrap her in the sheet on which she had lain ; strange men came in, and as he looked on they sealed her from his sight. He knew enough to remember there were prayers to be said, and no one but himself to say them. But prayer itself seemed a long way off ; his necessities were beyond prayer. The strange men took her up ; he saw the doctor wiping his eyes, one nurse was weeping, and the voice of the other came to him from the next room as she sang, soothing Punch.

Through the fading darkness he saw a group of people on the opposite side of the street, ap-

## Committed to his Charge

parently oblivious of storm ; surely some of them were weeping too. They were Mrs. Forby, and some others, and a stranger stood with them. Huntley found his books were in his hand, the ones he always used at the cemetery. He remembered that they were not going to the church ; these men wanted to get her covered up. In some way, he never remembered how, prayers must have been made, for in his next conscious moment he found himself standing by an open grave. He had always liked that Presbyterian minister, but he wondered why the man was now standing beside him. Mr. Forby and Mr. Low were on the opposite side of the grave, and the strange men stood near, with ropes in their hands ; there were two others, with spades. A space had been cleared about the grave, but the snow hid all traces of it and their feet were deep in the newly fallen whiteness. He heard himself reading, but the darkness fell fast ; he could not see, there were no words to remember, and he looked up helplessly. Then somebody was swinging a lantern over him. He was reading the Commitment, but he didn't know the words ; the light went out, and he stopped. Then the light and the weird, dancing shadows

## Committed to his Charge

began again. "Not to be sorry, as men without hope." What an absurdity! The swinging lantern had nothing to cast its shadow upon but his own ghastly face. "Suffer us not through any pains of death to fall away from Thee." He heard the rattle of spades and earth, great clots of snow and ice; where she had been but a moment before there was nothing but a depression and scattering in the snow.

At his house the nurse, good little soul, was ready for him with cordials and a brisk fire; but he had not known it was cold. She told him Punch was improving fast, taking nourishment; they had him in the back of the house and the front part was ready for being disinfected. He remembered that hideous, blackened figure, and that the doctor said everything was to be destroyed. That night, curious watchers saw a single light moving from room to room in the darkened house. They guessed what he was about and waited for the sudden blaze from the yard; the light from it showed his tall figure as it moved at his work, adding the fuel piecemeal; the blaze subsided to smouldering embers, then a circle of ash and black.

The doctor had been called away as he left

## Committed to his Charge

the cemetery ; he now returned to the Rectory intending to do, or help in doing, what he found already done. He stumbled through to the back of the house where the nurses, Punch and the servants were domiciled, and they told him that the Rector was in the main building and wished to be alone. He muttered something about the nurses "having more sense," and went, lamp in hand, to search. But he did not find what he expected. Tom Huntley was not only alone but in the beginning of delirium. Before daybreak he was strapped securely upon a stretcher in his own room, shouting, raging, calling for Helen ! Helen ! Helen !

## CHAPTER XIII.

### AFTERNOON TEARS AND TEA.

MRS. FORBY, Mrs. Lindsay and Mrs. Lyte sat in the small parlour at Dunfillan. Without, though bright, it was bitter cold ; but they sat before a blazing fire, and were comfortable. All three were crying as busily as if tears were the business of their lives. Which was manifestly not the case.

"I knew," sobbed Mrs. Lyte, "that he—could never—get over—that night's work. Flesh and blood—can't stand—more than a certain amount."

"But it was necessary," answered Mrs. Lindsay, spreading her wet handkerchief on her knee to dry in the heat of the blaze. "It had to be done on account of the globules ; and he's a man that whatever's to be done he'd do it while the breath of life is in him. But the pretty gloves—the nice things she set such store by—her dressing gown, with the lace collar she bought of Mrs. Stuart——" Mrs. Lindsay cried again.

"Marjory was the only one that seemed to

## Committed to his Charge

know," said Mrs. Forby. "Mrs. Stuart told her, and the poor little soul——" Here the heroic Mrs. Forby broke down; her grief was as strong as her other feelings, and it may be said she howled. She tried for enough self-control to continue her story.

"She said, 'And won't I ever see my pretty mamma ever again, Mrs. Stuart?' Oh-h," and Mrs. Forby once more gave loud vent to her grief.

"I suppose they will all be rich," hazarded Mrs. Lyte.

"I don't know, I don't care," sobbed Mrs. Lindsay.

"But if *he* dies we must all care," said Mrs. Forby; "and there seems but little hope."

"Has anyone heard of the baby? How does she get on?"

"Splendidly, thriving like anything—Ridgy's food and biscuit and milk, and beginning to take notice and say *goo* so prettily. I do love a baby when it says *goo*. Dulcie and Mrs. Lucy are devoted to it. I wonder what will become of them all."

"Goodness knows!" said Mrs. Forby. "Perhaps that fine lady friend will come back. He doesn't



## Committed to his Charge

seem to have any relations, and her people are touring it on the continent. Their money all comes from the old country, and they went off after that last fortune came. And now she won't have the enjoyment of her part."

"She has come into a larger fortune than any of them," said Mrs. Lyte, wiping her eyes again. "I never knew a sweeter, better woman. I don't think she ever did a single thing, from getting up to going to bed, without thinking first if it was right. And such a clergyman's wife!"

"Such a mother!" antiphoned Mrs. Lindsay. "Oh dear, oh dear! If she only hadn't kissed Punch!"

There was silence for a moment.

"Did you notice a strange man that day of the funeral? He stood a little way off. Nice-looking; like a gentleman."

"Yes," said Mrs. Forby, "but he didn't look a bit sympathetic. I noticed that much. Some stranger attracted by the crowd. He has been in the town about two weeks, Mr. Low was telling me. He's expecting a remittance from the Old Country."

"Oh, one of those remittance men," said Mrs. Lyte, in a tone of contempt.

## Committed to his Charge

"I'd put a tax of fifty dollars per head on every man like that coming into the country!" Mrs. Forby spoke with heat, and forgot her grief for a moment.

"He is a nice-looking man ; wears his clothes with quite an air," said Mrs. Lyte, "and swings his stick as if he was walking about his own estate." Living at Dunfillan had given Mrs. Lyte the sense of being a person of property, and she had a tone peculiar to the occasions on which she displayed such a sense.

"He is good-looking enough to be the villain in a play." Mrs. Lindsay, in her malapropisms, continually failed to hit her mark, but her random shots sometimes made a bull's-eye. An artist in embryo, she felt the romance she could not define, and instinctively thrust the stranger into the place which he held in it.

"I do hope Dulcie Sweeting will be good to that baby," said Mrs. Forby, going back to the subject of interest. Her eyes were still red, and her voice became tremulous at mention of the baby. Mrs. Lyte headed off further emotion by calling an order to her daughter.

"Here, Anna—you might bring us a cup of tea."

## Committed to his Charge

Anna was a pretty slip of a girl, with soft voice and manner, and fair plaits hanging down her back, Marguerite fashion. She brought out a small trestle and soon had an old tray on it, set with cloth and plain white cups and saucers. The two summers and two winters of Helen's stay in Slowford had not seen many changes, but there were some tolerations, and one of them was afternoon tea on occasions. Mrs. Low still protested she did not eat between meals, but Mrs. Lindsay, true to her record, had not let Mrs. Huntley stay far before her in this or any other fashion. Mrs. Lindsay often made visits away from home, and always on leaving she put a collapsion box inside her trunk. On the return journey they came separately, both very full, usually of bargains. She had taken flight not long after that memorable Wednesday and returned in triumph with a basket-table. Poor Mrs. Lyte, equally true to her instincts, had got her son, as handy as herself, to put some ash-wood turnings and carpet binding together, and a useful tea table was the result. When her old tea-tray was on top of it, with a cover done in wonderful stitches taught her by Helen, and her best set of white and gold upon it, she felt her-

## Committed to his Charge

self equal to any. To-day she had her common white. There was no make believe about the tea, for Mrs. Lyte always stopped short in her game of supposin's at the eatables and drinkables.

The three women were very cosy, and outside there was bright sunshine, the music of many bells, and the crispness of an ideal winter day. The sight of afternoon tea brought up memories of Helen, and for a moment a return of their united grief was threatened. Then in tragic tones, of an intensity greater than any used over the death, Mrs. Lyte exclaimed:—

*“ The tea has boiled ! ”*

Mrs. Forby tasted, smacked and reported favourably ; boiled or not, it was very good. She held her cup midway, as she watched Peter advance between the white walls of the garden path. Looking at that depth of whiteness it was hard to believe that tulips and violets, and all kinds of summer sweetness were hidden beneath, awaiting new birth. Cups full or half full were put down, and the women ran to the door. Mrs. Lindsay reached it first and spoke back at the others, throwing her information over her left shoulder. Why does a woman always look backward over her left shoulder ?

## Committed to his Charge

"They are afraid of pallarosis," she cried.  
"Come in, Peter ; we can't all stand in the cold."

Peter's solemnity resembled a dromedary's, and an old Hudson Bay coat donated by Mr. Lucy did not harmonize with his cast of person or face. He twirled an ancient fur cap in one hand, while the other hid from view a pipe that sent little waves of odour through the clean-aired hall. He cleared his throat and moved his lips, as if repeating something for the last time before it was committed to speech. Then he spoke slowly and solemnly.

"He is suffering the most scrutinizing pains, ladies, and the doctor he bid me tell you he was afraid it might calumniate in pallarosis, as Mrs. Lindsay was repeating my very words as I am his'n."

Mrs. Lindsay had a warm corner in her heart for Peter, a sympathy born of companionship in perversion of speech. But whereas she seldom missed and always enjoyed his crimes in English, she seldom or never corrected herself. To-day there was no smiles from anyone.

"There's *crowds* comin' in from the country," he continued, finding no voice but his own able for speech. "The whole Arm was in to market

## Committed to his Charge

'is mornin,' all along of angshiety. I gave young Kippan a wibe, I did." The wave of his head indicated enjoyment in retrospect. "He was comin' to the front door at the Rectory as I cum round from the back, for the nuss, that is the Rector's own nuss, not the boy's, wuz talkin' and givin' me all perticklers, and sez I to he, I sez, 'Kippan, has you *one* conscience 'mong the hull four famblies of you?' I sez. Then sez I, judicial-like, '*Hunt* for it, and 'dorn your moral and paint your tail. For,' sez I, 'you'll have no more chance of vilifyin' and seducin' that good man in there, for he's *dyin'*,' I sez."

"Oh, Peter," sobbed Mrs. Lyte. "Is he really dying—did she say *that*?"

"Why don't they send for outside talent?" demanded Mrs. Lindsay from behind her fire-dried handkerchief. "Why don't they send for— for a necropolist?"

"She said just that, ma'arn; them's her very words. Mark *my* words, it all comes of when Providence was flown at in the face of, offerin' up prayers for that there young boy. My mind misgave me the minute I heard that strange passon prayin' for the life of the only and beloved son. I sez to myself, inwardly, as I polished the

## Committed to his Charge

c'lection plates in the back of the church, I sez *that's* 'dolatry. Well, they got his life, and hers paid forfeit. And now his own is lost, and all along of keepin' that there boy, agin the distribution o' Providence."

Peter had a proprietary way with Providence, as if he kept it in his pocket.

"As for another doctor," and he turned in answer to Mrs. Lindsay's demand for a necrologist, "our own man can do his work with anybody."

"Peter—Peter!" cried Mrs. Forby. "Whatever do you mean? It was right to pray for poor little Punch. Any father and mother would do that."

"It ain't never been customary in this yere Church in all the years I've ministered to it," answered Peter dogmatically, ready to stand by his doctrine and a point of precedence. "No, no; I've been sexton nigh on thirty-one years, and never was Providence flied in the face of from that place before."

To his dying day Peter maintained that had Punch been allowed to die, "as it was intended he should," father and mother would have been spared.

## Committed to his Charge

The three gathered no more that afternoon round the friendly teapot. Mrs. Forby put on her bonnet and went home, and Mrs. Lindsay did the same after making Mrs. Lyte lie down, leaving her with a wet handkerchief over her brows, in the way loved by some women after indulgence in a good cry.

Mrs. Forby, an unemotional person, prided herself upon having few fancies and that those few never mastered her. Her wet cheeks tingled in the frosty air, a physical result of grief outside of her control ; but the tingling tended to make her dwell upon the cause of her grief and feel alive to influences which would have remained unnoticed save for the tingling. As she passed the Low's comfortable home she saw the master of it and his man consulting together over the spring hot-beds ; the sun was pouring down a strength of heat, the keen air cut, while the fervent glare melted its way wherever it lay. The thought of coming spring had hitherto brought little to Mrs. Forby's mind but plans for house cleaning ; now life, the enjoyment of it, the loss of it, came to her with new meanings. She felt as some sensitive persons do when a hasty footstep crushes a busy, happy insect out



## Committed to his Charge

of existence; the thought of spring with its quickening, of the re-waking of that world asleep under its pall of white, of vacant places to be filled no more, of orphaned children, gave her what she described to herself as "a turn she had never felt before." She pretended not to see or hear Mr. Low's salutation; further speech was impossible. That alone was indicative of feelings abnormal in Mrs. Forby.

Peter went his way down the white-walled path, pipe in mouth and fragrant wreaths curling before his nose in the keen, pleasant air.

"They feels real bad, they do," he soliloquized, "and well they may. We won't see their likes again. She were a sweet lady, she were, and he be a-dyin' for pure love of she. It were a pity about the boy. They made a demi-john of him, they did. Them's the Rector's own words as I were a-nailin' up the ticket."

## CHAPTER XIV.

### MR. FORBY'S SECOND LOVE AFFAIR.

BUT Tom Huntley did not die. Most of us are made of tougher fibre than our neighbours suppose.

In a sense he lived, but in a sense he died. A man of the same name and calling was on his feet again and with his people, but he was hard to recognise. And he best knew it himself that the physical change was as nothing to the inward one.

Helen died in February. It was soft April weather, with thickening branches and the sound of running water, bird songs and spring hum in the air, when he took Mr. Forby's arm to make a first promenade up and down the verandah.

He had not seen his children yet, a fact known to everyone; but they did not know that since his recovery no prayer had escaped his lips, no aspiration had been formed in his mind.

One day, when the nurse was busied about his room, he called to her from the chair, where

## Committed to his Charge

he sat propped up with cushions. His large, wasted hands, hands that had been so full of character—"capable-looking hands, I call them," Mrs. Forby had said—lay limp on the eider coverlid.

"Nurse, will you go to the study and bring me a large Church Service you will see there, and my Greek Testament?"

She did so, and he fluttered the leaves in an uncertain grasp. She laid her hand on the Testament, but he restrained her with, "Not that, not yet," and he put it on the table near him. Then he read through his office, as he had done daily since ordination until the date when everything stopped. From that day he read it as usual, but he felt himself incapable of personal prayer. There are things that cannot be borne twice. To pray was to think of her; to think was to lose her again in thought. The time might come, would come, when, after life had been taken up again in new scenes, such a familiar fashion as fervent private prayer would reign again. But not yet.

Those are sad prayers we make when we kneel for the first time and for-ever leave out the name which has been always on our lips, leave

## Committed to his Charge

out petitions for the life which was once as our own. To realise that that life is beyond our earthly wants, to know that its needs are determined by limits unknown to us—can the sense of separation go farther? The power of feeling had come back to him, but it was in a numbed condition; nor was he inclined to hasten the process of waking. The house was bright and home-like; nurse and Mary saw to that and each day some one of the Guild was there with flowers and fruit, and the delicacies that might tempt a returning appetite.

New blooms stood in the windows now, as the two men walked before the open casements, and the white lace curtains gave summery flutterings. Cold would come again with May and fires be relighted, perhaps even in June, but now there was growth and life in air and sight and sound.

“I wonder,” said Huntley, “when I shall be able to get away.”

There had been much discussion as to the lines upon which he would take up his life again, and Mr. Forby waited rather anxiously to hear in what sense “going away” was meant. Huntley answered his look of inquiry.

## Committed to his Charge

"You know, Forby, I shall have to go. I am sorry; but it could not be borne, my dear fellow. Your own sense must tell you that." A year ago it would have struck the Rector that life without Mrs. Forby could be comfortably endured, in any place, by her husband.

"No one can reasonably object to it," said the Warden, deep regret conveyed in his own tone, "but the regret will be universal. I can tell you that."

"You are all very kind. Wherever I go, many memories will go with me. And not all sad ones; some very pleasant ones. I have been thinking that perhaps it will be better to go back to school life. I don't know that a parochial one has been particularly suitable to me, or I to it. I don't fancy I have been much of a success," and he ended with the ghost of a smile.

Then something happened which would have made the Rector stagger at any time, but in his present state took him completely off his feet. Mr. Forby spoke, and spoke as no one, least of all himself, ever supposed he could. He disclaimed any possibility such as that conveyed in the Rector's closing sentence; he went over the circumstances, one by one, which had dis-

## Committed to his Charge

tinguished these two years of Slowford life; he dwelt plainly, and with unvarnished speech, upon the shortcomings of the people and the forbearance and hard work of the pastor; he depicted the charm of the Rectory as a home, the example to be found there for the fashioning of all their lives; and once more he went over the improvement in the services, the liberality with which private means had been used in general disbursements. But he faltered when he came to the personal love they bore the man himself, and the affectionate memory they had of the woman whom he and they mourned.

“You convince me, Forby, that what I have always thought is true—that cheerfulness is the most popular virtue going. If it can be called virtue.”

“I had always imagined it a virtue.” Mr. Forby looked surprised.

“Yes, most people do. I have my doubts, myself. Like amiability, it can be cultivated, no doubt; but I don’t think we can regard ourselves more for possessing it than we could for happening to be born with beautiful blue eyes and a good figure.”

“I have heard my wife say”—Mr. Forby’s

## Committed to his Charge

tone was dubious—"that religion which did not make you sweet-tempered had done very little for your soul."

"It is hard to say. My opinion is that amiability is as much born in one as a genius for music is. Just as you can cultivate a germ of musical taste you can your amiability germ; but nothing except being born musical or amiable can make you a success in either way. You can conquer yourself, be heroic, and a great deal more fit for heaven than your amiable brother and sister; but you won't be amiable."

Mr. Forby looked very depressed, not to say disappointed. Vague ambitions, out of all keeping with his age and figure, had been floating in his mind for some time.

"Well," he said, after some moments of reflection, "I have always taken a kind of comfort out of homely proverbs. 'Never too late to mend,' for instance; and 'Forgive and Forget.' I don't hold with being hopeless, nor yet with bearing malice."

"You are lucky if your experience has taught you that those are practical proverbs, ones to be worked upon." They walked in silence for a few moments, then the Rector repeated softly, once

## Committed to his Charge

or twice, "Bear ye one another's burdens!" The first man who refused that wailed that his punishment was greater than he could bear. He turned his face to the wilderness, a wanderer, and found his punishment in having to bear alone. I'll have to get out of this, Forby, or I shall go mad. You talk about forgiveness and forgetfulness in the glib way one who has nothing to forgive and forget has a trick of doing."

The warden was distressed, feeling that he had stumbled upon something exciting to the yet weak head and frame. He begged him to go in and rest.

"No, no! let us keep in the air—the house chokes me. You are mixing your sin and your sinner, Forby. We confuse our ideas of forgiveness with the possibility of forgetfulness, and expect that from the two will flow a healing sufficient to cure that which is forgiven and perhaps forgotten. The sinner may be forgiven; but the sin with its consequences lives on to all eternity."

"I always supposed that if any man had the chance of a clear conscience it was a clergyman."

Tom Huntley's arm tightened on the one supporting him. Mr. Forby was as full of tact



## Committed to his Charge

as Mrs. Forby had described the Rector to be in former times, when he "began a canvass by cantering over their corns." The warden thought the sick man captious, and expected contradiction just as he expected uncertain steps and weak voice.

♦

"My dear fellow, there is no such thing as a clear conscience. Conscience is but a name for consciousness of sin. If defeat were unknown victory would be impossible, wouldn't it? Some wise man says, somewhere, that it is high time for those people to die who have outlived the sense of their own misdemeanours. I must have a long life ahead—how the burden grows!"

He spoke wearily. Mr. Forby consulted no more, but led him towards a verandah sofa placed in the angle of a bay window, and called to the nurse to know if sitting in the air would be injurious. No, but there must be wrappings and pillows. The warden found himself floundering among the soft things, and much to his own surprise, produced comfort out of chaos. Then he lighted his pipe and sat down by the sick man.

"We strayed away from the subject of your having a change," he said adroitly.

## Committed to his Charge

The Rector smiled.

"I don't think that was quite the way I put it. I shall have what you call a change, no doubt, but there must be some place for a final settling. It is time to think of the children. How good Mrs. Stuart has been, and Mrs. Lucy, and Miss Sweeting! How good you all have been!"

The warden waved his hand deprecatingly.

"They only all wished they could have done more. I believe you could have a Harvest Home if you wanted one now."

They both laughed.

"We'll see," said the Rector. Mr. Forby noticed the expression, and divined that his eloquence of half-an-hour before had not been without effect.

"Of course people differ ; and allowances have to be made for custom and up-bringing. But my own idea would be that to take right hold and buckle to, would be the best thing for you. It would for me."

Huntley looked at the open, honest, somewhat slow face before him and sighed. His adviser's sins of omission and commission would necessarily run in a narrow groove, for he had been born and brought up in Slowford.

## Committed to his Charge

“Small private means are the makings of a lazy man, Forby. I have indulged myself too long to make the effort you propose. Besides, people are constituted differently, and trials do not bear the same proportion——”

“I know, I know,” said the warden hastily. He appreciated his Maria’s virtues and abilities, but he was aware he could live without her. This man before him was a revelation of the end to which love and tie and loss might lead.

The matter ended in a compromise. With summer weather came returning strength, and with every discussion of the subject some new proof turned up of regard from the parishioners, even from those of the Arm.

A year’s leave of absence was given by the Bishop, a curate was engaged for the charge, and the elder children permanently installed with Mrs. Stuart. She was ready to take the baby as well, but her small house was now stretched to its full powers of accommodation, and Mrs. Lucy and Miss Sweeting were so ready to continue their part, that the pretty little thing was left undisturbed. The Rectory was shut, and Mrs. Lyte took charge of the curate.

Everyone expected that the year’s leave would

## Committed to his Charge

be spent in England, and there were many speculations as to Mr. Huntley's people there and what effect a home-going might have on him. Everything was arranged for the whole year—by the Guild, to its entire satisfaction.

Great was the surprise when he joined a touring party bound for the West. The excitement attending the new world opened up by the Canadian Pacific Railway had not yet had time to flag, and this party, in its own car, would make the trip at leisure. The Rector would be dropped *en route*, for he had friends in the Kootenay, and his plans were made to see something of them and mining life at the same time. The chances were that he would find some one to join him going South for the winter, and the Slowford doctors advised a season in Southern California. These were the most definite details, everything else would be determined by time and chance; but he and others agreed that the more complete the change the better would be the results. By the time goodbyes were said there was not much doubt but that on his return he would settle down to parish life in Slowford.

“I don't know but if he'd been born poor and not able to afford all this it would be better for

## Committed to his Charge

him," said Mrs. Forby. "There's nothing in this world like having something to do, and that's got to be done, whether you die in the doing of it or not. If all this had happened to the old Rector he wouldn't have taken it so to heart; he couldn't have afforded it."

"He might have afforded to die," answered Mr. Forby. This irritated Mrs. Forby.

"He'd much likelier have felt badly, and kept it to himself more. He'd have married within the year for the sake of his children, and have forgotten all about it by the end of another."

"Well, let us be thankful he can do without that last," replied the Warden. He remembered certain scenes during that pitiful convalescence, and Mrs. Forby's common-sense conclusions jarred upon him. "Even when the married state is entirely voluntary it is apt not to be entirely satisfactory, and if entered upon as a means to an end there is no saying how much gas might accumulate." Mr. Forby was President of the Gas Company, and liked a borrowed metaphor.

"He'll marry all right enough, gas or no gas," said Mrs. Forby oracularly. "You can none of you help it, any more than swearing or smoking."

## Committed to his Charge

"You aren't very complimentary to yourself, Maria."

Mr. Forby would have liked to be gentle, if he only knew how. A great desire that way had grown upon him of late, but unfortunately any remark made by him, or argument advanced, had the effect of rousing his wife. Now, when he meant to be gentle, he only irritated. Mrs. Forby had been dusting the dining-room as they talked; she now flew at the carpet sweeper, and aimed at inconspicuous crumbs. Her husband knew this to be a resource against himself, for she had more than once swept him down.

"Now, Maria, you had better hold yourself in time; for you know, as well as I can tell you, that you can't manage yourself any more than anyone else can do it for you, once you get the bit in your—the carpet-sweeper in your hand."

Mrs. Forby gave a tacit assent to this by making a superhuman effort at self-control. She succeeded, but renewed her attack upon the spotless carpet and inoffensive, hitherto sacred, corners of furniture.

"Maria!"

The sweeper clattered generally, banged particularly this once against a table-leg.

## Committed to his Charge

"Maria!"

Mr. Forby blushed, first red, then violet, and, as hath been written of men before, became a perfect sunset of self-consciousness. Then he did a very bold thing. As she and her weapon went by in full panoply of war and lunging after conquest, he reached out his hand to detain her, and before she could defend herself his arm had actually encircled her waist.

"*You* are not going out of your head?" she queried, wriggling in his grasp, if a figure designed on the principles of Mrs. Forby's could be said to wriggle. "*You* are not going to have brain fever, are you?"

"Maria," he said again; this time she remained passive. She kept her hand, however, on the top of the sweeper handle, surveying him at close range over her closed knuckles.

"God bless my soul, Maria," he blurted out, disengaging himself for the purpose of mopping the beads of perspiration which stood on his face, "you helped me out a deal better than this when I proposed to you!"

Mrs. Forby smiled grimly, and took advantage of her release to move several paces away.

"You can't admire those people any more

## Committed to his Charge

than I do," she said ; " but admiring is one thing, and copying is another. Perhaps you'd like me to call you ' my dear ' ? "

" Oh no, Maria ! Not so strong as that. Just a little—well, a little more civility, now and then. We are of one mind about the Rector, and his sermons, and Mrs. Huntley, and everything. What is the use of all they did, and all he has said, if there is no practical result ? You know you are always saying, Maria, that religion ought to do something towards making one sweeter-tempered. I'll try, Maria, upon my soul I will, if you will only help me."

Mrs. Forby's face took on a look of pity, and she glanced away from him, across the garden, where the brightness of an ideal summer day breaks the outer world in beauty. Had she, too, felt the absence of any of that inner beauty now so humbly wished and striven for by her husband ? She continued to listen, silent, with her hold on her weapon somewhat relaxed.

" I never thought very much of being warden before. In all the years I've been Rector's Warden I never thought of it but in two ways, a kind of a nuisance, and a kind of a duty that had fallen to me to do. Well, I'd like to be



## Committed to his Charge

something more than a warden, Maria ; I'd like to behave like a Christian. Upon my soul I would. And you know, although we can't be like the Huntleys, we might be different from what we are. If you'll try, I'll try. Upon my soul I *will*."

Here Mr. Forby's blushes returned, and fresh beads simultaneously appeared with them.

"Give me a kiss, Maria."

Her gaze returned to him, as vague fears for his sanity overcame her ; but she saw he was in deadly earnest. Her voice in answering lost much of its hardness, and the strong lines in her face took on a look that in another woman would have been wistful.

"We began working so hard," she said, "so I suppose we hadn't time for anything else. There's nothing like work for hardening. It is as bad on the heart as on the hands ; look at mine!" and she held out her two horny extremities to her husband. To her astonishment, he carried one of them to his lips and kissed it.

"Maria, we are well enough off to afford to take time for anything we want, civility or anything else. Get another girl. Do anything you like that will cost money, but do stop driving."

## Committed to his Charge

He took the sweeper from her unresisting hand and bore it to the door, where he called the itinerant angel who was then making a brief sojourn with them. His wife looked half vexed, half amused.

“You have been so fired by the Rectory ways that I suppose you will want me to take them all up. Well, I can't. Mrs. Huntley's way was to have one room done at a time, a way I never could abide, for the first gets dirty again by the time the last one's swept. I like to turn every mortal thing out on Friday, and know that at least once a week things are clean.”

Mr. Forby groaned ; he was one of the things turned out. It was a joke in the neighbourhood that on Friday mornings Mr. Forby might be seen taking his after-breakfast smoke as he sat on the sun-dial, with a background of red and yellow sheepskin mats overhanging the verandah railing. Mrs. Lindsay said she had seen him there in the rain, smoking under an umbrella. But then that was Mrs. Lindsay. Now, perhaps, Mrs. Forby suspected that he aimed at an overturn of her administration of the interior which would allow of smoking within doors on Fridays. He caught an inkling of her suspicion, and felt

## Committed to his Charge

that he could not hazard an advantage gained by allowing her to retain such an erroneous impression.

"Turn the house inside out twice a week if you like, Maria, and me too; only do get another girl," and he put on his hat to depart.

"Just like a man," soliloquized the mistress, as she gazed after him down the garden path, "and he knows as well as I do that even one won't stay with me, at ten dollars a month, to finish her time out." Possibly meditation on this last fact forced conscience to acknowledge that the maid was not wholly to blame. But, alas, for the power of long-established habit. Ten minutes afterwards there was a sharp intimation in the usual heightened key.

"I thought ——" began the maid in self-justification.

"I'll trouble you not to think, but to do as I tell you."

Then, much to the girl's surprise, her mistress left the subject, ignored the mistake and reprimand, gave some general directions, and slowly went upstairs. Some time ago, we saw Miss Sweeting upon her knees, and had a peep at the self-glorification which illumined the

## Committed to his Charge

nightly orison at the shrine of conceit. Mrs. Forby now sank upon her stiffened members ; her broad countenance, like the wizened features of the other, was buried in her hands. Presently, through the closed fingers, with their enlarged knuckles and broadened nails, a few tears trickled on the spotless whiteness of the counterpane. Instinctively she took out her handkerchief, not for her own needs, but to dab away any hint of blemish on the surface. Her head sank again, sideways this time, and a groan burst from her. Mrs. Forby was as energetic in groans as in all else. Over her, in a flood resistless as her own house-cleaning suds, swept remembrances of scared boys, dull morning looks unsweetened by a good-bye, sharp words at business papers tidied out of reach, remorseless burnings of "truck." The ghost of a fishing-rod, which came to an untimely end when found in an improper corner, stalked out and mocked her ; quick on its phantom heels came the yelp of a puppy, then the sorrowful face of its young master ——

"I don't doubt but the boss has been givin' missus a dressin' down," said the maid to herself that night, as she surveyed the reddened eyes of one who was foe by virtue of office.

## Committed to his Charge

Mrs. Forby had more than once gazed long a Helen's short upper lip, and speculated as to whether that upper lip could be universal in the sex. Mrs. Forby's own was her chief feature and a very expressive one. That evening it trembled as it and its fellow, long unused to kisses, were offered for the salute which, man-like, her husband almost forgot to bestow.

It would be idle to represent her as sweetly restful or idle for the future ; nothing but Death could make her either. But now and then there were intervals, when husband and wife astonished the town and themselves by walking or driving together. Man-like, Mr. Forby had wished his Maria might be different ; manly-like, he had resolved to be different himself and to give her a chance to do the same. It is one thing to resolve, and another to do, and so Mr. Forby found it. But they came up the aisle side by side on Sunday mornings, and there were occasions when, in pronounced twilight, and with doors securely shut, Mrs. Forby voluntarily kissed her husband.

Slowford was a gossiping town, but such a thing as a downright scandal had never taken place in it. People's minds were attuned to such a pure key, that it required small matter to make

## Committed to his Charge

talk. It may be doubted if the most flagrant dereliction as a wife could have astonished her townsmen and women as much as the Forby episode would have, had the truth ever transpired. All that the public knew was that systematic work and exemplary living were bearing a goodly harvest. The Forbys had achieved all their ambitions, and were now going downhill amiably and comfortably.

## CHAPTER XV.

### THE BURDEN RESUMED.

IT was the end of June when Tom Huntley left Slowford on his western trip, and he did not return until the following May. Part of the prescribed cure was that he should be away from all old associations, from his children, without brain work of any kind for that length of time.

The character of his reception in Slowford, the quality of the affection shown him, and the conviction that there his work lay, made him determine to remain. During the time of his return journey it was borne in on him that he was on his way home. Outward bound, his impulse had been to continue westward for ever, if that were possible, to go and never stop, never to return whence he came; now he knew it to be home—as much home as that word could ever again convey sense to him.

He found his children much changed, grown, and all the picture of health; their management

## Committed to his Charge

had evidently been the happiest. In turn, they hardly recognised him, so altered was he from the father they had known. The baby, naturally, would have nothing whatever to say to him. Unlike the others she was a shy little thing, but just as pretty as they, and the counterpart of her dead mother.

There were alterations to be made at the Rectory before a final settling ; things to be put away, and general preparation in anticipation of a new management. It was June before everything was ready and Ann and her charges installed. Then came the question of baby. Miss Sweeting and Mrs. Lucy were more than willing to keep her ; but although that was not to be thought of as a permanent thing, her stay lengthened out until the beginning of August.

In the year of absence Church matters had gone on in an even, business-like manner, free from the excitements, plots and counter-marches which had distinguished the parish before that time. The one guiding thought in all was to have everything as Mr. Huntley would like it to be. The curate, guileful young man, fell in with the scheme, as by letting the Guild take the



## Committed to his Charge

helm he was saved much personal responsibility and inconvenience. The Rector was touched by such devotion, and appeared properly thankful ; Mrs. Forby took her share of his gratitude, and denoted where the rest of it should be distributed. Especially was he to be grateful to Dulcie Sweeting, for, according to Mrs. Forby, she had worked wonders. Miss Sweeting disclaimed notice, but took care to let all that had been done be seen with telling effect, the light cast by good works forming a proper halo round her small person. All this once would have furnished Tom Huntley with amusement and study ; now sensation did not go beyond thankfulness, or a desire to be properly in that state. The curate resigned his charge, and a Guild *resumé* of his performances and the year's work followed. Mrs. Lindsay expressed wonder that he had escaped suspicion of attention from Dulcie, the first of his cloth to do so.

"Let her alone," said Mrs. Forby, "she has other fish to fry."

Soon Huntley realised the saying that 'tis grievous, with all our amplifications of travel, both by land and sea, a man can never separate himself from his history. People and things

## Committed to his Charge

settled themselves, and a day came when he knew that as it was so should the days of his life be henceforward. The seamstress formerly employed by Helen in spring and autumn was in the house, busy at the children's frocks; Mary was in the kitchen, Ann in the nursery, and the baby was that day to return for good. In the morning, boxes and hampers of her wardrobe had been dropped by the Lucys' carriage, and the little lady, in Miss Sweeting's arms, was driven off, smiling and radiant in anticipation of her morning drive. The sun-bonneted face was full of contented excitement, and her small mouth chirruped to the horse as she handled the dangling end of the reins beyond Mrs. Lucy's controlling fingers. Her friendship with Ann was begun, and once or twice she had deigned to be glad when her father made her his daily visit.

Antecedents and consequents are distinguished by being dexterously tied together; great events may fail to move us, but even Church dignitaries, male and female, are sometimes swayed by the merest trifles.

Three o'clock came, and Huntley sat in his study reading. His hair had whitened, and the

## Committed to his Charge

lines about his mouth were so deep that the expression of the whole face was changed. Instead of not looking his thirty-eight years, as the Guild had remarked when he came to Slowford, he might now pass for a man of fifty. He was still supposed not to read anything that could try mind and memory, to keep much in the open air, and lead an easy life. At this juncture extra corrugations were in his brow, for Ann had made him a visit to complain that Mary was neglectful in some portion of her department—a visit which Mary had forestalled by that morning making him aware Ann's interfering ways were beyond bearing, and that unless the master would restrain them she, Mary, would "just put up with the thing no longer." The tones of the two voices came between him and the meaning of the words on the page before him. As he tried to fix his attention, the sound of a wrangle between Punch and Judy came from the lawn, and he looked up to throw them a warning. There was no tennis net there now; beyond, the stable doors stood shut, ponies and carriage were gone, and he saw Peter, pipe in hand, surveying what once had been a geranium border, dug and ready, but now

## Committed to his Charge

unplanted. He returned to his book, visions of prairie scenery and the life of the last year in his mind ; what a fool he had been to return ! and again to his irritated thoughts returned the complainings from life below stairs.

When he heard wheels stop he threw away his book, glad of a diversion. Coming down the steps was Miss Sweeting, with eyes and nose very red, but calm and prepared for sacrifice ; in her arms a radiant morsel of pink and white and lace and embroidery, all shrouded by a huge sun-bonnet that flapped back enough to show the pretty rings of curly hair. It was a trying occasion, with something of the air of an operation about it. Somehow, the Rector's thanks got themselves expressed, Ann was called and baby delivered to her, and he thought all was finished. But he reckoned without his host. Miss Baby scientifically planted her thumbs in Ann's eyes, and drew down the skin of that good soul's face until there was danger of permanent injury to sight and to such good looks as there might be. Baby's lungs were equal to her muscle, and shriek rose upon shriek as Ann carried her away from Miss Sweeting. This was not to be borne. Dulcie's lips quivered

## Committed to his Charge .

and her ferrety eyes filled, as she answered the appeal by a movement towards the child.

“You may go, Ann,” said the Rector, in a lordly, masculine way. “Give her to Me; I’ll manage her Myself.”

He moved between Miss Sweeting and Ann, and held out his arms for his child. But she ignored them and held out her own chubby ones, with renewed cries for “Toosie, Toosie”—her rendering of Dulcie’s name. Securely held by her beloved nurse, and with Ann departed, she turned, with a fine feminine instinct, towards her father and said, “Ha-hah!”

The syllables had been taught by Mrs. Lucy, but their application was nature’s own teaching. The burly, six-foot man stood there, helpless; Miss Sweeting dried her own eyes, wiped off the big drops that stood on either pink cheek under the twin stars, and essayed a quavering sentence.

“If you take her now, I will run away quickly.”

He took the child, and she ran.

But not far. Again the ten nails and fine lungs came into play, and below and beyond a deeper voice implored her to return.

## Committed to his Charge

"She might have convulsions," said Tom, loosening himself as from the claws of a bat; "her little heart is bursting out of her body."

If Mrs. Forby had been there she would have recommended an old-fashioned remedy called spanking; but Mrs. Forby was not there, and things took a course solely directed by the baby finger-tips.

## CHAPTER XVI

### IO TRIOMPHE

WHO can say how much he was influenced by his sense of honour, by his infant's distress, or by the memory of those complaining maids ?

There was nothing for it but to wait until Willie Winkie came ; so, much to her own surprise, Dulcie found herself a Rectory guest at dinner. When the meal was over, Miss Queenie insisting upon keeping her in sight meanwhile, Dulcie set herself to her usual evening's work of rocking, singing and story-telling. The Rector was due at a school-house meeting, and as he left home at half-past seven his last view of the nursery disclosed Dulcie in the old low rocking-chair, before a newly-made fire, baby on her lap, with Tommy—otherwise Thomasina—in night-dress, kneeling beside her and clamouring for a story. Dulcie ambled along comfortably, with a goblin for subject ; but the small tyrant protested. " I want a really man and a really woman, she must have a name, and

## Committed to his Charge

he must *do* something!" The father smiled; it was an echo of her mother. Eleven struck as he returned, and the patient Dulcie was still in the chair. Queenie had had a thorough fright of possible loss, and convulsive starts and clutching fingers were the result. Twelve o'clock saw the cradle filled, and Dulcie safely home in the Rector's convoy.

The next day was a bad one in Rectory annals, for Queenie made it for all concerned one of veritable humiliation and atonement; the distracted Ann and equally distracted father took alternate rounds with the small enemy. Night added a new terror, for croup developed, and another midnight found Dulcie back in the rocking-chair, with a bundle of mingled pain and contentment in her lap.

Next morning Peter, with a message to the Warden's house, delivered with it sundry items of Rectory news.

Early as it was, Mrs. Lindsay was already there, announcing she had "just ran in to pass the time of day," but the exciting topic inferred from Peter's observations made market forgotten.

"Do you recollect," said Mrs. Forby, "when



## Committed to his Charge

Mr. Short was ill, years and years ago, how Dulcie carried on with that man the Bishop sent us? Why, I remember, when the Delabaughs had scarlet fever and one of them was so low the clergyman was sent for, the messenger met him as he was seeing Dulcie Sweeting home from some of her everlasting meetings. Of course nothing would do her but she must go too, and as she couldn't go in, he left her his lantern to keep her company at the gate. He got smoking with old Delabaugh, and forgot all about her. . So up and down she walked, wagging that lantern. They *said* it was a full hour before he jumped up in a great fright—which was quite unnecessary, for he found her patient and sweet as ever, and she *would* have gone on swinging it for another hour!"

"Now, a girl who could do that makes a woman who *would* do anything," said Mrs. Lindsay, much impressed by the tale.

"Then we must go and save her," and Mrs. Forby rose.

In silence the two set forth. "You know," continued Mrs. Forby, as they walked towards the Rectory, "after all, there is a great deal in the *idea* of such a thing. If she had held the

## Committed to his Charge

lantern for Mr. Short nobody would have said a word; but because she did it for the other man the town rang with it."

"That's neither here nor there," said Mrs. Lindsay. "She did do it, and the town did ring." Then, after a pause, "do you suppose she thinks Mr. Huntley will marry her to save her reputation? Perhaps it is a deep-laid scheme!"

"Not he! She is too clever to lay a scheme like that for a clergyman. This is no work of fiction; it is fact. I've often heard of one of them compromising a young woman, but nobody ever knew one marry an old one to save her reputation,"

"I suppose not," said Mrs. Lindsay. "Talking of fiction, I've just been reading the writings of one of them—Ingoldsby Legends it is called. I saw Jim convulsing over it, and it certainly is funny, but queer for a clergyman to write."

"Do you suppose wearing a black suit and a low-crowned hat makes them any different from other men? Not they! They're six of one and half a dozen of another, that's my opinion."

"I've just come to a place," said Mrs. Lindsay,

## Committed to his Charge

going back to her legend, "where they are exercising the ghost."

"Dumbbells, I suppose." Mrs. Forby spoke grimly, scenting a mistake, but not sure of the original.

"No; a bell. Just a bell, a book, and a candle. It is great fun."

By this time they had arrived at the Rectory gate and descended the three stone steps. The task did not seem so easy now; Mrs. Lindsay fain would have turned back, but Mrs. Forby was built on a sterner model, and she rang the bell.

"Is Miss Sweeting at——" Mrs. Forby felt the form of her inquiry was premature—"Is Miss Sweeting in?" she asked of Pinkie, who ran towards the open door, skipping-rope in hand, before Mary could answer.

"In what?" said the child.

"In a fix," said Mrs. Lindsay, under her breath and half laughing.

"Queenie had croup last night," volunteered Pinkie as they followed her to the drawing-room, "and Toosie is lying down. She was up all night."

"Did you ever!" said Mrs. Forby over the

## Committed to his Charge

child's head. "Where is she?" she asked, with a stony glare.

"In papa's study; so papa is writing in the dining-room not to disturb her."

Mrs. Lindsay knew where the study was, but had never seen what she called its sacred insides. She was glad that at last an opportunity had arrived, and followed Mrs. Forby's quick footsteps thither with a will. Dulcie sat on the edge of the leather couch, holding her head like one still dazed from heavy sleep after long watching.

"What? How?" she asked, not without dismay, as she saw her two visitors.

Mrs. Forby took Pinkie by the shoulders and put her out of the room. "This is no place for a little child," she said in a stage aside for Dulcie's benefit.

Even a worm will turn. Sleep and all, there was dignity in Dulcie's attitude as she rose to her feet and confronted them.

"We have come," said Mrs. Forby judicially "intending to save your reputation; but it is hard to save what you have not got. Where did you spend last night?"

Her question carried with it little of interrogation.

## Committed to his Charge

"Here," said Dulcie simply, meaning the house.

"*Here?*" meaning the study, and Mrs. Forby, with more exclamation points in her voice, turned to Mrs. Lindsay. "And Mrs. Lucy never came to look after you?" Mrs. Forby thought it wise to let blame fall on some one else at this point.

"Mrs. Lucy stayed with me till two. We had hard work to save her," and Dulcie's eyes filled.

"Dulcie, Dulcie," said Mrs. Lindsay, taking advantage of this sign of weakness, "what would your poor mother have said to see this day!"

But a fourth was suddenly added to their number. The Rector had heard the footsteps pass the closed dining-room door, and anxious that she should not be disturbed he hastened out. He met Pinkie, just as she had been ejected, and the *portiere* had swung back on the open study door; so, standing there unseen, he had heard all.

He had had another trying morning—Punch had to be punished, the daily governess had come to say she found herself unable to go on with her engagement, and Ann and Mary had been outrageous again—"going on like the very devil"

## Committed to his Charge

was how this dejected looking man had described it to himself.

"It is awfully good of you," he said, "to come and look after Miss Sweeting. She has been rendering me services I can never repay, and piling up for me a debt of gratitude. I intended seeing her home myself, as soon as she had had some breakfast. Ann has just brought you a tray to the dining room," he added, turning towards her kindly, and before they knew exactly what had happened, the two self-appointed district visitors found themselves going up the three stone steps and on the pavement.

"He is as bad as she is," said Mrs. Forby, when she had regained her mental balance.

"Let us hope it will come all right." Mrs. Lindsay was rather glad to find herself safe in the open again.

"Ah—h—h! It can never do that, to *my* mind. But things may be mended. I've no doubt they will—and," she added significantly, "I don't know but we have helped to mend them."

Which was true. Having safely bowed them out, Huntley returned to his study. Queenie, refreshed by her long sleep, had been dressed

## Committed to his Charge

and brought down, and now sat, smiling and serene, in Miss Sweeting's lap.

"That is the Doctor's ring," said the Rector abruptly, as, if stopped by it in that which he would have said.

Dr. Martin came in, and the usual pleasantries passed between them, he calling the Rector "Your Reverence," and the latter designating him as "Sawbones"—a term of endearment by which Dr. Martin was universally known; for a finer man, or one more steadily perfecting in character, than Slowford's chief doctor never existed. Queenie was so well that a drive would make her better, "and," said Sawbones, noticing the fluttering of poor Dulcie's face, figure and hands, "her nurse is tuckered out and would be the better of a turn too." So the Rector was despatched for Mrs. Lucy's carriage.

"Low be it spoken," said the Doctor to him at the door, and looking round as if he expected Ann to confront him, "very likely last night's business would never have happened if she had been here all the time. That, of course, can't be; but if she offers again to take your youngster, don't put obstacles in the way—at any rate, not until these teeth are through."

## Committed to his Charge

When the Rector came back, announcing the carriage, Queenie was having a free fight with Dulcie and Ann over the amount of wrapping they thought needful, and which she did not. Passing the open dining-room door, he noticed that the empty coffee cup was the only sign that Dulcie's breakfast had been touched.

During the interval of the drive, Tom Huntley went through a bad quarter of an hour with himself, undergoing the process which we call making up one's mind, and the mind was still rather chaotic when the two returned to him. A natural interchange of courtesies ensued, he gratitude-burdened and Dulcie, for once, honestly shy. But the attempt to once more leave Queenie in her own home had the usual result.

Miss Sweeting stood in the doorway, waiting, while Tom held the tyrant tightly in his grasp. The little arms were again held out, and she only waited transportation before uttering another Ha—hah!

Some instinct warned Dulcie that the divine moment had come, that the chalice she had dreamed of, unreal and impalpable as Sir Galahad's quest, was about to be put to her lips. The lines of her light little figure relaxed, and



## Committed to his Charge

she stood with head bowed, in a transport of delighted expectancy, wanting but a lily in her hand to be an Annunciation maiden. What mattered it that her hair was grey, and the crowsfeet of many winters were lining her once pretty face? In that moment Youth returned for a fleeting visit, and the world shone in a light and glamour unknown to those to whom youth brings its belongings in due season. It was pitiful—how little it took to gratify this woman how eagerly she could drink the dregs left from another's cup of happiness. Huntley spoke in a low, strained voice, his words as they fell carrying astonishment to himself.

“You know, as well as I can tell you, that I have nothing, literally nothing, worth offering to you or any other woman. I offer you my name and my home. You already have my deepest gratitude; but gratitude is not everything. However, it is all I have to give.”

Dulcie required no second bidding or invitation; she accepted them all, gratitude, name and home, and did not hazard loss by stopping to parley. She took back her charge, and pressed on the baby face a kiss of new import and pleasure. Poor soul, the kisses and flowers of love's dream

## Committed to his Charge

were not for her, except as she gave and made them.

“Will you, then, continue to keep her,” said Tom, “until——”

It was a most unlover-like episode, but Dulcie's maiden bosom was filled with a rapture such as she had dreamed of but never hoped to realize.

She went out of the Rectory door an engaged woman ; her lover put her in the waiting carriage ; and as baby sat in her lap, looking at the Rector that infant for the third time remarked Ha—hah ! The syllables by no means fitted with them an's expression. He looked forlorn enough.

Once at home at the Lucys, where things were familiar, nothing would satisfy Miss Baby but a sojourn on the floor. Dulcie hastily gave her for plaything an ornament which at another time would have been too valuable to so hazard. Now, nothing material mattered. She flew up the staircase to her friend's room. There is no beautifier like a happy mind ; already a brightness shone in her face, the puckers were fewer, and the light in the twinkling eyes was one of joy.

“Hetty! *Hetty!*”

Mrs. Lucy turned, half frightened.

## Committed to his Charge

"What *is* the matter, Dulcie—where is baby? I thought I heard her; wouldn't she stay? *What* is the matter, Dulcie?" for the poor thing's heaving chest bespoke strong excitement.

"Hetty!"

She put one hand to her side to still the throbs; the other she extended, sure of sympathy from this one friend.

"Hetty, I'm engaged! Mr. Huntley has asked me to marry him!"

## CHAPTER XVII.

### THE REMITTANCE MAN.

THERE was no reason to prolong this engagement, every inducement towards a hasty end to it, so early one perfect September morning there was a very quiet wedding at All Saints. The bride looked ten years younger, instead of nearly that many older, than the groom. Her "I will" was emphatic.

"Dulcissima," said the visiting parson, "wilt thou have this man——"

"I will," said Dulcie, then blushed, and allowed him to finish ere she reiterated her vow. Her response was audible to every member of the Guild as they sat in the choir seats, and a laugh rippled out. There were no tears at that wedding; but there were some sad looks and tender memories in which the bride had no share. The Rector wore the forlorn air and uninterested manner that had distinguished him of late. His heart, or all of it remaining to him, was still

## Committed to his Charge

in his work ; but, as Mrs. Forby said, he had lost all snap, and he now allowed and followed where once he had loved to scourge everyone ahead of him. In spite of the half-obdurate organ that ticked inside his own waistcoat, Mr. Forby thought there might even be such a thing as a broken heart ; "such is the power of love," he thought, and sighed. The children were with Ann in the gallery, wondering at her tales of a new mamma, with certain confused remembrances of their own tending towards contradiction ; saying little but thinking much, as is sometimes the way with children.

As Mrs. Huntley sat in the carriage at the gate, for they were to leave immediately on their quiet honeymoon; she leaned forward and herself drew to the door on their sacred privacy. There were crumples in her rose leaves, and she looked forward to finding several more, when she and Ann would be face to face. In the meantime he was hers, and she would fain keep off even the air of the outside world.

But, as time went by, no serious difficulties ever did occur. Dulcie Huntley showed a domestic management highly superior to the one she had so long exercised parochially. Formerly

## Committed to his Charge

she had had a faculty for stirring up the dregs of other people's tempers; now she threw oil on troubled waters and made plain sailing for herself and others, such plain sailing that even Ann had no objection to make to the management of the ship. The children were happy, baby had now no excuse for gibing "ha-hah" and Mary was mollified.

And the man for love of whom all this was possible, what of him? He carried his grief-worn face about with him, without hint of change in it; he was gratified, and tried to think he was happy. He said he was content, and well he might be; there was nothing his world could give that he had not. But because Heaven had in its keeping the one thing he yearned for and might not have, he turned his back on all else, and the parish whispered that the Rector was growing morose.

Dulcie made some mistakes. One that tended to drive him towards madness was a laudable attempt to imitate her predecessor as faithfully as memory would allow. It was all too faithfully. The same terms of endearment came from her lips, the same small attentions, even Helen's habits, were reproduced; and to the

## Committed to his Charge

husband such work was hideous travesty. It often happened that when the happiness of his children, or the well-ordered pleasantness of his home called for gratitude, and that sentiment would seek some outward sign from him, she, with amiable impulse, would seal his lips by an ill-advised copy of tones and words dedicated, in his mind, to one now for-ever silent. Ridicule from abroad followed poor Dulcie's efforts; she had too long been the butt of the wise and the witty in Slowford for such opportunities to be slighted. This she might never have known, had not her absent-minded husband assisted her to find it out. On one occasion he had been at the door when Mrs. Lindsay called; he showed her to the drawing-room and stated that Miss Sweeting would be with her in a moment. When Dulcie appeared the visitor repeated the joke, but like jokes of its kind it was calculated to wound. Nor could even her not over-sensitive spirit fail to detect the failure that followed most of her best-intentioned efforts in wifely deportment and speech.

"Was 'my husband' at home?" questioned Mrs. Forby when she met Mrs. Lindsay afterwards.

## Committed to his Charge

"He was indeed, and told me Miss Sweeting would be down in a minute!" Then they both laughed, that laugh, not wholly of amusement, partly of contempt, which some women, God knows why, often bestow upon their sisters.

It may be remembered that on the day when Mrs. Forby and Mrs. Lindsay watered Mrs. Lyte's tea with their tears, as they mourned Helen's death and anticipated the Rector's, they mentioned a strange face which appeared in the crowd watching Helen's exit from her home. This stranger had been dubbed the Remittance Man, partly because when pressed for payment of current expenses he always spoke of an expected remittance from England, partly because he owned a name difficult to pronounce and in sound quite at variance with the arrangement of its letters.

Certainly, he had been interested in that little procession, although the cast of his face was not one to display active sentiment of any kind. Tall and well dressed, he had a look which indicated entire absence of necessity for work or exertion. As Mrs. Lyte had remarked at that afternoon tea, he swung his stick as if he owned an estate, and he eyed passers-by with a super-



## Committed to his Charge

cilious stare which was at once aggressive, critical and condemnatory. As Tom Huntley stumbled out to follow his wife's body that day, the stranger put up his *pince-nez* as one might on reaching the thrilling moment in a tragedy-comedy.

"Poor beggar!" murmured the Remittance Man. "He seems to take it deuced hard. 'Pon my word I haven't the heart to bother him. And yet it seems foolish to let pass the chance of earning an honest penny." His views of honest pennies were peculiar, if not original.

His history would stand, with slight variations, for that of dozens of those whom the comfortably fixed Canadian dubs "poor devils." The poor devil is one generally cursed with wants unsupplied and wishes unattainable, haunted by spectres of bygone hours, or opportunities let pass. His title amounts to the precision and expressiveness of a definition, devil being the genus, and poor the essential difference. It would have spoiled the beautiful consistency of this particular devil's character had he done anything honest or straightforward.

Naturally, in the beginning of his emigrant life he had taken to the north-west. Naturally,

## Committed to his Charge

also, he had expended his capital in a ranch. His original kit contained three dozen pairs of socks; these he wore through in turn, put them in a laundry bag which was adorned with an embroidered monogram, failed to be petitioned for work by any squaw-laundress, so emptied out the socks and wore them a second and yet a third time, then called the country an unmentionable place and prepared to leave it. He watched from afar his scampering investments as they galloped towards sunset; then, in a pair of his thrice-worn socks, he sauntered eastward. In transit he had been invited to break his fast on but one Canadian home. With his English fellow-sufferers he had cursed his lot volubly, and sponged on his countrymen whenever there was opportunity; but, even when hungry, the Canadian he spurned. In this one native home which he decided to honour, he put up his *pince-nez*, the better to survey the strange dish offered him. "It's in the devil of a mess, isn't it?" he inquired of his host, and the invitation was not repeated. So, in ways inscrutable to the cisatlantic mind, and adapted by an all-merciful Providence to his kind only, this bit of English thistle-down floated along till it settled

## Committed to his Charge

in Slowford. There was a certain picturesque ness about the place, suggestive of an English market-town. Looking at it from the gentle slope on which the Church stood, to its motley roofs, curious angled streets, and at the old-fashioned folk and lazy dobbins which made its traffic, the likeness could not fail to strike an Old-Country eye. "So it has, hang its impudence!" said the Remittance Man, when his attention was drawn to it. And in this manner did Tom Huntley's recompense come to him.

It is true that the Remittance Man was ingenious. His grandmother, on whom he relied for annual presents, showed signs of cooling sympathy, a prospect not to be thought of lightly. So, in the lazy, insect-humming Slowford summer time, he caught what we familiarly call a "devil's darning needle," carefully pressed it, and enclosed the monster to the good old soul as a specimen of Canadian mosquitoes, the accompanying details of the nightly horrors he experienced, warily leading to a request for fifty pounds. He got the money, spent it, and beat his brain to find him more. Inspiration conceived the plan of raking up and adding to the old scandal which had expatriated Tom

## Committed to his Charge

Huntley years before. He left the place for long enough to allow of correspondence and the mastery of details, and returned to Slowford in that wintry blizzard when Helen had been put under ground. Had he sprung his mine earlier Huntley would have faced it, lost his parish through it, because, as Mrs. Forby said, Slowford was so respectable ; but he need not have died of a broken heart. By that time there was no spirit left with which to combat the forgery and tissue of clever lies, and his own conviction of his first wife's death availed not. Such escapades are even yet not unknown in graduate and undergraduate life. The holiday spent on a farm, the farmer's pretty daughter, the hasty and concealed marriage, absence and repentance, are incidents common to every generation. The knowledge of the young wife's death, only to be proved by testimony difficult to obtain in an isolated Cumberland parish, was not strong enough, added to the man's own horror of having early scandals repeated in his new life, to stand against an unscrupulous black mailer. The stranger had a nimble brain, and hesitated not to use it.

Then came the almost fatal illness of the

## Committed to his Charge

Rector, and at the time he was at the lowest ebb, when the bulletins hinted at paralysis of the brain, the Remittance Man shook the dust of Slowford off his shoes. And he made some disparaging remarks about the town, the country generally, and about some of the inhabitants in particular.

“Like my luck, not to have been a month sooner; could have made my pile before he collapsed. This precious big estate the small community is so exercised about won't be worth a brass farthing to *me*.”

He rang the reading-room bell and ordered various liquids. When they arrived he eyed a glass of water critically in the light.

“Even the water in this beastly country is bad. The damned stuff has neither colour nor smell.”

He proceeded, by additions, to give it both, and for the rest of that evening he continued to make similar blends. His departure was managed so adroitly that he left a large balance unpaid for liquids, cigars and general keep. About the time of Miss Sweeting's wedding he reappeared, and the wedding procession was viewed in his former loftily-interested manner;

## Committed to his Charge

but when the bride gave special care to the shutting of the carriage door he laughed outright.

“Gad! It’s about as lively as the other one—the poor devil looks as cheerful with the new wife as the dead one! She’s got him, and means to keep him; hark to the snap of the door on their *solitude à deux!* Well, *I* shan’t let him escape this time. I might even join the wedding journey. But she’s bound to bring him back safe enough.”

On his second coming he settled his small debts and then renewed his tales of a remittance, alternately insulting and patronising those whom he dubbed “the natives.” He was thrown in the way of but few, but the few cordially disliked him; work-a-day Slowford had neither welcome nor patience to extend to such owners of unpronounceable hyphenations of bad manners and worse morals. When his tailor annoyed him with a dun he expressed himself in direct terms.

“Confound his cheek—it’s enough to be wearing his infernally bad garments without being expected to pay for them! I have fallen pretty low when I have to get clothes here.”

## Committed to his Charge

Inwardly he fumed at the Rector's delay in returning, and in a casual tone he remarked that he hoped to have the pleasure of calling at the Rectory when Mr. and Mrs. Huntley came home.

On one fine October day he rang the Huntley bell and was shown into the drawing-room, where Dulcie sat in the midst of her family, wisely beyond words. A large, decorated basket stood near her, and in it bits of work which told of the finishing off of many small garments. Marjory sat near her in a small rocking-chair, her face intent over a bit of first sewing; on the floor was an open Chatterbox, face down, ready to be brought into use when sewing failed. Dulcie rose to welcome the stranger, clergyman's spouse evidenced in all things, and doing her vicarious duties with tact and great personal satisfaction.

"My husband will be in directly." She never tired of that proprietary phrase. "He is with Peter in the stables,"—for a new phaeton and a staid, elderly horse had been bought that day. The lacquer, gloss and dash of Helen's possessions were not there, but the present purchase was good for family use and quiet country driving.

## Committed to his Charge

She rang the bell and bade Ann find the master, while she used all her arts to make time pass pleasantly for the stranger, and she amused him not a little. Formerly he had worn a beard, but his present shaven state, with only moustaches left, added to his naturally distinguished appearance. Mrs. Huntley was impressed, and determined to do her best for the honour of the Rectory.

The stranger stood with his back to the window, the early twilight of an October day leaving him in shadow, while the room and its occupants stood out in the clear light from the open fire. As Tom Huntley entered he held in his hand the card with the unpronounceable name engraved upon it. The name seemed familiar enough to him, for he spoke it glibly. He stood for an imperceptible moment, fingering the bit of pasteboard, and then advanced. He knew the man, if not his mission, and in the walk from stables to drawing-room had made up his mind how to meet him.

“How do you do?” he said, as if they had parted but the day before. “I see you have already met my wife.” It was seldom he so designated Dulcie, and they were precious and proud



## Committed to his Charge

moments to her when he did so. "Come into my study, we may as well sit there."

It might have disconcerted another man bent on a similar errand to be so met; but the Remittance Man was accustomed to lay his tax on different people in differing fashion, and as accustomed to be met in a variety of ways.

"Same game bird he always was, notwithstanding domestic afflictions." Possibly Dulcie was numbered in the latter. "I wonder if he keeps a brace of pistols in his study. Well"—and a finely kept hand, wearing a crested ring, was thrust in his own pocket—"Not that I ever needed to so much as show mine. Common sense gets the better of them all, I find."

When the two men emerged from the study later the Remittance Man was debonair as ever, with an air of general well-being greater than usual. But the beads stood out on Tom Huntley's forehead, his white hair hung damp, and there was a look in his eye his doctor would not have cared to see.

That evening he took a walk to Hillside Cemetery. Twilight was over, and to his surprise he found Punch rushing by him as he opened the gate.

## Committed to his Charge

"Oh, papa!" panted the little lad, in excuse for the late home-coming—for Dulcie was most particular about hours and the proper places in which to spend them. "Papa, my chickens have all come home to roost! You know they went away this morning. I couldn't help being late—but my chickens have come home to roost."

Whatever reprimand had been on the father's lips died away, and he laid his hand on the curly head and sighed.

"They generally do, my boy. Go in and tell mamma all about it; she will forgive, under such distressing circumstances."

"Where are you going, papa? Couldn't I go with you?" The child looked hard into the face, so stern and weary and pained, above him. "Are you going over there"—with a wave of his hand—"to see our other mother?"

The sharp click of the gate forbade more than words, and Huntley turned to pursue his way alone. Every twig in tree-crowned Slowford stood out against the pinks and blues of the October evening sky. It was that hour when the dead seem so near—we on the brink of the darkness which envelopes them, they surely somewhere in the visible brightness which hangs

## Committed to his Charge

so far above us. He plunged into the thick pathway between lines of firs, with a wish that it was the one which would lead to unknown light, unknown darkness. As he came into the open a clear, pale moonlight made every grave distinct, each marble slab at its whitest, and he found himself beside the Latin cross sacred to the memory of "Helen, beloved wife."

"Beloved wife"—often taken in vain; but it was no fashion of speaking here, no perfunctory rendering of homage, no general term by which to cover up years of indifference or worse. The man's tall figure had never regained its carriage or vigour, and to-night the droop was even more apparent. As he stood, with head uncovered, he reviewed the last fifteen years of his life, change by change; through the dark times of the earlier years, the despair, the shame, the inward battles, the efforts to keep up a wonted exterior, until the day when she

Met me like a herald, face to face;  
As Day meets Day upon the farthest hill,  
And whitens all the darkest depth of space.

And she had continued to glorify his life, unknowing of his past, believing in him implicitly; she had been the means of enabling him to live

## Committed to his Charge

at least a useful life, forgetting almost all that had gone before, so restful a life that he had ceased to fear. Now the awful expanse of a shadow-peopled space was about him.

He rested his forehead on the white cross-arm. How cold it was! how his head throbbed! In that phantasmagoria of the past were the speculations, the fancies that, as much as her beliefs, have made Oxford what she is, and old schemes of thought worked themselves out anew, till the hope of heaven, the certainty of a life somewhere beyond, came as faint streaks of dawn after black night, and the striving man felt himself cry, "Thou are there!" And again, as the mists further lifted, "Thou art here!" The dampness which was but the dew of evening was met by another moisture, the tears and sweat of blood that are discernible by but one Eye.

"To think"—and he laid his hand on the cold arm of the stone—"to think that I should ever be glad to know she lies there!"

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE END OF THE SIN OF SILENCE

DULCIE'S married life was short ; but also it was happy. Her happiness had limitations of which she was fully aware from the first, which she accepted as inevitable and at which she never grumbled, even inwardly. Parochial work she completely laid aside ; the parish saw Her Reverence no more—and, as of the dead, there was little but good spoken of her. Mrs. Forby's prophetic soul had argued rightly when she said that many of Dulcie's unpopular public performances were caused by the want felt by many single women of a domestic arena for their abilities and virtues. "She longs for what we have and she has not,—home, wifehood and motherhood," said Mrs. Forby. She now had all three, in so far as they were possible to her, and contentment filled her soul. She still had to run the gauntlet of Guild opinion ; but now that that assembly was relieved of her interfer-

## Committed to his Charge

ence and over-zealous work, it could afford to be just. It is so much easier to be just at long range. Mrs. Lindsay considered that "she spoilt baby some, but on the whole was an excellent stepmother. What a pity she's so obstinate about using fertilised milk."

Mrs. Forby had her doubts in matters of ipecac and goose-oil, and thought Pinkie had croup "oftener than was reasonable. But what should Dulcie know about babies? We ought to be thankful they're not all little angels with their mother. For my part, I think she is a world's wonder."

Month succeeded month and the Remittance Man was still in Slowford. Month by month Tom Huntley drooped. There were occasional calls at the Rectory, which came to be taken as a matter of course; a manner of reception always civil, never friendly, but careful to avoid offence. The stranger lived comfortably and continued to mention remittances. The next item of gossip was that his supplies did not come by post. Whether this information betokened infringement of that silence supposed to surround the management of Her Majesty's mails, or whether it was due to the fact that Mr.

## Committed to his Charge

Low was postmaster as well as warden cannot be said; but such was the gossip. And it was one more virtue laid to popular Tom Huntley's credit that he could be so generous to an acknowledged ne'er-do-well.

Another wonderment was caused by the change in the tone of the weekly sermons. "A Mahomedan might give them," said Mrs. Forby. Then came an offer from the Rector to get a curate at his own cost, and with the advent of the curate the sermons in which the people were instructed in all the virtues began again. In general Church matters it was now the people who would be progressive, and the Rector inert or in opposition. With Thanksgiving the Guild declared for decorations on a grander scale than those of the first year; but the Rector begged to have them put off.

Christmas came and went, the five small stockings were hung and filled beside the study chimney, February storms followed, and Helen's grave was again as white as on the night when her husband, beneath the fitful lantern light, had prayed that he might not "fall away" at his last hour. He sometimes thought of the darkness that fell and enveloped him as the poor flame

## Committed to his Charge

went out, and wondered if he had then lost the power of prayer.

With March came an epidemic which fastened on one's lungs. People recovered, but were subject to a second attack through want of care, and the second illness was invariably fatal. Tom Huntley was one of these victims, and Mrs. Lindsay said he died of the relapse. The saying took root in the country mind, and it became a custom to so discriminate between the cases. His first illness passed; but he took little care to remain well, and childish ways cajoled him in vain. His affairs were in order; the family means were so regulated by life-interests and stewardships that there was little for him to do but to make provision for Dulcie, which he did past chance of failure.

No one but the Remittance Man himself noticed the coincidence, but it so happened that after an absence of the latter Tom Huntley died on the day of his return. There was yet another stab to be given that erring and repentant one ere life went out, and the blow was dealt by his own son. Propped up by pillows in the low window of his bedroom he caught a glimpse of the familiar figure with swinging cane,



## Committed to his Charge

and the upturned eyes met his. An unaccountable whim all through his illness had been his strong desire to constantly see his children, and the sudden dismissal sure to follow. The sight of the merry little faces was more than the sick man's eyes could bear.

"So like their mother, every one of them," Mrs. Lindsay would say, each dismissal a fresh page in her romance.

"Most likely it's the idea of leaving them to that foolish Dulcie," thought Mrs. Forby.

"Oh, Dulcie's no fool," answered her frequent champion, Mrs. Lyte. "Mr. Huntley could not have done better than he did."

This morning, after he had been removed from sight of the passers-by to his bed, Dulcie left Punch in charge while she made busy about her jellies and sick-room comforts. "Thick as dust in vacant chambers," thoughts and phantasies thronged in the sick man's mind. He had almost forgotten the sprawling boy, who, face downwards on the hearth with book before him, drank in the terrors of Monmouth's execution.

"Papa!" cried the sharp young voice. "Papa! What was it that was wrong with Monmouth?"

## Committed to his Charge

Why couldn't he be king after his father? What is ——”

But Punch's third query was never finished. Dulcie stood in the doorway, her small silver tray laden with some new donation from Mrs. Forby. With a cry she thrust the tray away, tore at the bell-pull and called to the boy to bring his sisters, flinging over her shoulder commands to the flying maids about doctor, cordials and curate. For her quickened eye told her the final moment had come. She raised him in her sinewy little arms, as the dying man gave her a look that pierced her heart—where she carries it still, her greatest treasure while her own life endures. The last regard fell upon the three little girls, who, hand in hand, stood before their brother, watching his eyes as they seemed to leave their sockets, their small owner feeling as if they would never go back in his head again. Suddenly the dead was stronger than the living, and the weight fell from Dulcie's detaining grasp, the face turned away from them all. With good feeling towards her fellow-servant, Mary swept the children before her to the door, and Ann, relieved of her charge, sat down before the fire, with apron over her head

## Committed to his Charge

Dulcie, dry-lidded, closed the half-open eyes and righted the weight upon the pillow. When she stood to look again at the lined, aged, and to her, dear face, small fingers plucked at hers as her hands fell idly against her. She caught the baby to her, hiding her face against the dimpled one.

“Toosie, Toosie,” said the child. “Mother, mother!” and Dulcie was comforted.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### CONCLUSION.

IF he had served the parish faithfully for fifty years he could not have been better mourned. Every mistake of his four years' service was forgotten, every good deed magnified. He had possessed those gifts which go farther than many worthier ones to make a man loved; he had outlived the small jealousies created by the unwonted spectacle of a Rector with independent means, retaining the glory arising from the possession of them. In places where money is scarce, hardly earned and proportionately valued, such things stand in good stead of much inner virtue and go far to create that ripple on the surface of affairs which we call popularity.

When Dulcie first came as mistress to the Rectory she saw that many of the once familiar things were no longer there. In her present capacity of guardian to the children she found that most of them were belongings put away for

## Committed to his Charge

them as peculiarly personal to their mother. One upstairs cupboard had never been approached by her, and it was with almost superstitious awe that she now turned the key in its lock. It was not a rich find; nothing but Helen's wicker table, on its top a much used work-basket, with a thimble the worse for wear, and a few odds and ends of stuff whose colours reminded Dulcie of the frontal. A silk kerchief and some half-worn gloves completed the list. Had they been put out of sight by Ann in precaution, or were they thrust there by the Rector himself? She remembered now that on one of his worst and gloomiest days she had met him in this passage-way, key in hand. They were all hers now, to do with as she pleased; so they went with what were valuables, to remain cared for until the maturity of the children. In their short married life her husband had proved true that which he had guessed at in the days when she was the Reverend Miss Sweeting—that she might be ridiculous and meddlesome in what did not concern her, greedy for praise and not over nice in assuming appearances to gain it, but at her best in the position she had hungered for so many years before attaining.

She was to have a small and pretty home of

## Committed to his Charge

her own for her future life-work, the rearing of his children. It is to be doubted if she ever, even on her wedding morning, was as happy as on the day she found herself comfortably in it clothed in her widow's weeds. A wedding ring was a thing to be desired, but weeds carried their own tale with them, and were of a size and complexion which would let none forget their significance. There had been days in the short married life when she felt inclined to pinch herself and ask if it were not all a dream, that she was but spending a long day with Helen, and the children might in a moment look for their mother's coming. But this was a home with no associations. The children dearly loved her, and no doubt would rise up some day and call her blessed; in spite of Pinkie's croup, they were judiciously managed, her own clear conscience, their happy faces, and the meed of praise bestowed by the outside world, made life a bright thing even in these early days of widowhood. She was a Relict, not a Spinster, and the badge and credential lay in these her precious weeds, handsome garments with no scarcity of crêpe surmounted by a pretty cap that lent new dignity to the faded prettiness beneath it. Slow-

## Committed to his Charge

ford had its own ideas in mourning, and deemed eternity itself not too long for a widow to wear weeds.

When Mr. Webb had taken to himself a second helpmeet the Misses Webb did not doff their mourning, but received with their new mamma, she radiant in blue and they sombre in sable—which showed their Slowford perception of obligation towards sex. Likewise Mrs. Jordan, although a widow of two years' standing, appeared as a bride a second time while adhering to weeds for Number One; "for," said she, "no one shall *ever* say I forgot my Joe!" Dulcie was likely to satisfy the home standard, and drooped most prettily in her clinging garments.

Meanwhile the Remittance Man felt his interest in the place die out; his claim on Huntley had been illegal, and he knew that wholly sane and healthy guardians would not be as ready dupes. He watched the third procession as he had the other two, went home to his slice of a room in the chief hotel of the place, smoked his pipe, imbibed his liquids, and made calculations for fresh victims and pastures new. Occasionally he addressed the figure in the glass before him.

## Committed to his Charge

"Gad! If it were not for you"—with a nod towards the glass—"I should lose the use of my voice. I have *no use*, as some of them say here, for that wish-wash composite, the Canadian."

As he sat, still smoking, the excitement of the street and the noise of the hotel lobby penetrated the blue of his little sanctum.

"My usual luck—I never yet tried to earn my living but Providence put a stone in my path. Providence," he murmured, as he struck another match, "is always inconsiderate." Then he rang his bell and ordered a fresh hot-and-hot.

"'Pon my word, I was almost sorry when I saw the poor beggar carried out to-day. How that big, mannish woman did howl!" Mrs. Forby's cup would have been full had she heard herself described as mannish.

Below, a knot of men had gathered round the public doorway.

"I opine he was somewhat weak in the upper region," drawled the United States Consul.

"I opine you are a thundering idiot," was Mr. Forby's hot retort.

And so the talk ran, till sympathy, criticism and dissection left not one fibre resting on another of the Reverend Thomas Huntley's character.



## Committed to his Charge

Such upheavals could not but influence the Chapter Room. One bright day in June the members are in full conclave assembled, the roll little changed from when we first met them save for the absence of Dulcie; the conversation wags as usual, although this time Tom Huntley's curate and not Tom Huntley comes in for the stabs. Outside the Chapter-room door, where once a struggle for life was kept up by the weeds in the unraked gravel, a screen of waving green, lilac, syringa and honeysuckle, gives forth in due season colour and scent. The walls of the schoolhouse, fashioned by an architect whose one idea had been adapted from a sugar refinery, are clothed in vines, Virginia creeper and Boston ivy, fluttering terraces that ripple in every vagrant breeze. The screen had been Helen's work, the ivy planted by her husband.

"It certainly is a great improvement," remarked Mrs. Lindsay, looking up from her work into the glory of sunshine framed by the shadow of the doorway. "We can see the passers-by, and they can't see us; and as for those flying butteries, it was a mercy to cover them up."

The quilting frames were out and filled, two

## Committed to his Charge

women to each, and already the holes in the stove-top meant for the lifter were half full of pointless needles. Through the open window came the hum of bees in the lilacs, a butterfly flew across the opening; the sound of falling water joined the busy throb of a mill, and up the slope came a boy's cheery holloa as he pushed his boat into the pond, the water a shimmer of dancing points as the little craft made its way behind the Rectory trees opposite.

"Everything is full of life; it seems hard——" said Mrs. Lyte. And everyone knew.

"She Sarah, Sarah!"

Mrs. Lindsay enunciated her soft Italian syllables like to the Kismet of a stoic. Abraham's wife was popular in Slowford, and three of the Guild answered to the name of Sarah.

"Eh?" said one, a distant relative, who might have been familiarly addressed by Mrs. Lindsay.

"Oh, it's nothing," answered Mrs. Forby. "Is there a draught? Were you," turning to her friend, "were you sneezing?" Then she did as she invariably did, when Mrs. Lindsay was guilty of "talking fine"; she created a diversion by sharp contrast.

"Look at my hands," she said, holding them

## Committed to his Charge

up. "I don't seem much the better of my two maids. I got rid of them both yesterday, and washed the outsides of the pots myself."

"Pots!"

"Outsides!" gasped the Guild.

"I am content if I manage to keep the *insides* of mine clean," said one.

"Oh well, I should never allow it to come to *that*. But it has always been my custom never to allow one girl to come till the last has left; and between them I go over myself all the things left undone. Now, with two, I get no chance to keep things as I like them. You're never rid of both at the same time."

"What a blessing for Mrs. Huntley—Dulcie—that Ann keeps on with her!"

"And yet she has her hands full, with that Punch," said Mrs. Lindsay. "And the baby—she's a handful, if you like. I saw poor Dulcie yesterday, and she had terrible cat's paws about her eyes. Her halycon days are over."

A ripple, more pronounced than at the enigmatical call upon Sarah, went round the room, but Mrs. Lindsay paused not.

"It's a great change. A pettight little thing like that——"

## Committed to his Charge

Mrs. Forby rose and folded up her work.

"One good thing that Dulcie has done is to give those children their proper names. If it had not been for the day the boy was prayed for, we should never have known he was Eustace. Now Judy turns out to be really Marjory, Pinkie is Mary; is Queenie Zeta——?"

"Zeta is surely Greek for something," and Mrs. Lindsay stopped to meditate what the Greek something might be. Mrs. Forby's wrath boiled over.

"If there's one thing I hate more than nicknames it is foreign languages!"

Mrs. Lindsay ignored part of the remark, and continued to give her own ideas.

"I dont so much object to nicknames when they show endearment. And more than one admirer has said the Rector's chief card was the Gospel of Home."

"I imagine it is easy to preach the gospel of home on three thousand a year."

"Was that what they had? I could never rightly find out."

"It may have been five for all I know, I only spoke in round numbers. I never tried to find out," said Mrs. Forby.

## Committed to his Charge

"Well, I did," said Mrs. Lindsay honestly; "many a time."

"And he preached the gospel of science too. Don't you remember that story of Dulcie's after they first came?"

"Oh, my eyes! Didn't he! Do you remember when he pictured all that astronomy had brought to us, Jupiter with his stalactites, and——"

"I have often thought it a blessing that our clergy are as hedged about as they are," said gentle Mrs. Lyte, "for after all they are but human."

"I must confess I can't get used to the present one," sighed Mrs. Forby. "He is so flat. And his voice. And his pronunciation——"

"Common," said Mrs. Lindsay. "Exactly. But I thought you didn't like broad 'a's'?"

"No more I did in Mrs. Huntley," replied Mrs. Forby stoutly. "It was all very well for him; but, as I said before, she was a Canadian and ought to have known better!"

*Che sara, sara.* In spite of atmosphere, there had been both romance and tragedy. Slowford had provided another heroine; but Slowford blinked on in its sleepy existence, unaware. Its healthy physical atmosphere, exploited yearly

## Committed to his Charge

in Health Reports, made it mentally obtuse. So far its only epidemic had been senile decay and mental atrophy, each fatal as Yellow Jack if not as quick. Most of the inhabitants took kindly to either or both, and doddered along until death relieved them. But now Slowford can hold its own with the brightest in appendicitis and heart failure. Slowford has grown progressive.

It is not the place to-day it was in Tom Huntley's short reign. The Works have been enlarged, Society has received new blood; progressive euchre and the Canadian Pacific Railway have swept down upon it and transformed it, and its landmarks, social and otherwise, are no more. Euchre was introduced by an heroic exile returned from the United States, and the boobies who had stood expectant through the ages were at last rewarded. Heroic, truly; for the man or woman who came with innovation to Slowford held the life in the hand. To be original anywhere involves hard knocks. To be unique in your native village is to invite the conservative eggs in it to your adornment. But progrestive euchre was accepted, although it was "so American."

## Committed to his Charge

In the Church set there are no more modest evenings with four tables for whist, supper afterwards, and lanterns lighted in the porch to guide the guests on their homeward way. Electric light gives an all-night service, and roast chicken, jelly-cake and coffee are replaced by pink-and-white confections, deadly ices, and jellied meats in wonderful shapes. But Mrs. Forby will not succumb to the last. When she gives her progressive euchre party she adheres to old supper methods, turns her jellies out of bowls, and leaves her turkey "with his bones inside his skin, as God made him."

At Homes and Afternoon Teas are allowed, sometimes enjoyed, and people show a growing ability to leave the chairs by the walls and pass and repass in the middle of the room; nay, they have been seen to stand and converse. This is a formidable lump for the three friends, the upholders of the Church set, to leaven; but they grasp their standard bravely and are ever in the van.

No position has changed so materially as Mrs. Stuart's. Alec is a rising Counsel, and his mother confidently looks forward to his being the youngest judge on the Bench. She now

## Committed to his Charge

knows everyone worth knowing in the various sets, her maid wears a cap and carries a small silver salver at the door; and sometimes, when the mistress of that well appointed house sits at her davenport before a pile of unfilled At Home cards, she wonders if she will leave the Forbys out.

As in the town so it is in the country, but in the latter the only power able to make a change is Death himself. Kippan is gathered to his fathers, and the Island is levelled to the surrounding sward. He retained his Protestant exclusiveness to the end, and his last will and testament held a parting fling at Rome, which he flattered himself would keep him exclusive for all time. When the will was opened it was found the directions for his burial provided a grave in a certain corner in his own farm; he would have none of the mixing of dust made possible by one general burying-place for Roman and Protestant alike. So a corner of a field by the beautiful wood was railed off, and inside it the Champion of King William was laid to rest. His wife, the silent person with the oblique eye, had had enough of country life, and the disposal of her share of the fortune resulted in the sale of



## Committed to his Charge

farm and protesting bones. The second owner held the place but a year and his purchaser was a Roman, though not of Mrs. McCaffrey's retaliatory disposition. Possibly Kippan now knows that men and farm lads, as they pass the wooden railing, crack jokes on the "crazy old Protestant" lying within.

There is a new Rector, poor enough to please those who thought Tom Huntley's means the cause of his few failings. The old Rector, with his entomology and geology, is almost forgotten and it is Mr. Huntley who is put before the new man when the latter is remiss in his duty. As for his wife, she has an impression that once an angel made a brief sojourn on earth, and her name was Helen Huntley. Helen's hospitality, her happy ways in decoration, her many virtues, are not allowed to die, they live continually as a stimulus applied by parish to Rectory. The former even quotes the Harvest Home, and tells a reconstructed story of that episode which encircles it with what we are accustomed to term a halo of romance.

Peter is gathered to his rest, and a new man, young and with ordinary clothing, ministers in his stead.

## Committed to his Charge

There is a new Rectory pew, but in the old one sits a sad-looking little widow, a serene contentment in her eyes as she looks from the blooming, girlish faces on one side, to a handsome boy on the other—"Eustace, only and beloved son."

THE END

